



# Fife Strategic Assessment 2024

## Final Report

July 2024

Topics: Community Safety, Economy, Education and Skills, Environment, Equality, Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Community, Population, Poverty and Deprivation

# 1. Introduction

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We have committed to producing a Fife Strategic Assessment every three years, to support the ongoing development of the Plan for Fife (local outcome improvement plan).

## **Purpose**

This report brings, into a single document, a definitive synthesis of the latest research, evidence and assessment about Fife, to highlight the shared challenges facing local communities and partner agencies.

Using the lenses of People, Place and Performance, this assessment is designed to inform the next phase of strategic planning and prioritisation of resources across Fife Partnership.

It is not an assessment of service delivery or functional performance. There are complex and persistent issues affecting Fife's communities. This assessment of their current impact on local people and places does not attempt to convey, or quantify, the value of the public services and interventions that have been provided over the past three years. That assessment is covered by each partner through their own service performance management and public reporting.

This 2024 assessment is an evidence-based snapshot of the state of Fife, in the context of many contributing factors. It is intended to provide insight and constructive challenge to encourage us to think about problems and opportunities in new ways.

The discussions it prompts will inform the direction and focus of our Plan for Fife in its remaining term to 2027.

## **Context and impact**

Uncertainty highlighted in previous strategic assessments, and more recently in national assessments, continues to be a feature of the operating environment. National and international factors are impacting people at a very local level.

The 2021 Fife Strategic Assessment focused on the roadmap for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It predicted a long period of recovery and likely downturn in community outcomes during that period.

Whilst that has proven to be true, progress has been made – such as the Fife employment rate returning to pre-pandemic levels – but efforts to recover have been further hampered by a succession of additional and significant economic shocks, a consequential cost of living crisis and rising international instability including the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian and energy crisis that caused.

The impact of the cost of living crisis and associated increases in food and fuel costs has been widespread, every household has felt new pressure, but the impact on low income households has been greater. It has tipped many working households into crisis for the first time and exposed existing vulnerabilities in others that has increased demand and the need for urgent support from public services exponentially. Local people generally say that cost of living, funding for public services, poverty and inequality are the major issues living in Fife today.

Fife has also proactively built upon the collaborative response during the pandemic and is making a significant shift to collaborative delivery under people and place workstreams and the redesign of public services in a person-centred way through initiatives such as No Wrong Door (NWD) and its wellbeing and prevention operating model. These are among the most significant reforms of public services in recent years and, as with many preventative models, will take time to design and implement.

Alongside this, Communities have increasing expectations of continuous service provision and improvement. It is no small task to balance strategic change ambitions and community expectations with increasing financial and budgetary pressures whilst still technically in 'recovery' given the ongoing nature of challenge.

However, the current environment is the new normal. It is a mix of continuous recovery and an urgent need to accelerate reform to meet ever compounding challenges. It calls for new thinking and an openness to change that will help develop Fife's public service workforce, apply technology, collaborate to deliver locally and secure the responsive, people-centred services Fife communities need to thrive going forward.

### **How to use this report**

This assessment explores recent evidence and emerging issues impacting on people and the communities they live in across Fife. It should be seen as a 'can opener' to be used to prompt and inform discussion and encourage new thinking about current service delivery, partnership approaches, community engagement and priorities for change.

It is designed principally for leaders, decision-makers and those involved in service design and development but can be helpful context for all those working in public service to build understanding of our communities and the collective challenges being faced.

## 2. Key messages

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### **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.

### **State of Fife highlights issues around equity**

High level monitoring of the State of Fife indicators shows Plan for Fife delivery is not having the intended impact. Latest data and trends reveal a worsening picture for almost all outcomes. There are significant inequalities in outcomes between most and least deprived communities. The gap is widening over time in relation to key life outcomes such as life expectancy and school attainment.

### **Inequalities in Fife persist and are widening**

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). The inequality gap in key life outcomes such as attainment, child poverty, crime rate, early mortality, emergency admissions, and participation of 16-19 year olds show that there is a greater gap in outcomes between most and least deprived areas of Fife, than for most and least deprived areas of Scotland.

### **Poverty persists and living standards continue to be squeezed**

Everyone has been affected by the cost of living crisis. Fewer people feel they are managing well financially now compared to before the pandemic. Those in the most deprived areas are even more likely to be struggling financially. For the first time in a ten-year period Fife's crime rate has exceeded the Scottish figure. The increase was driven by crimes of dishonesty reflecting the economic pressures households are under. The cost of living crisis is not over, and Fife's recent declaration of a housing emergency reflects funding pressures, lack of affordable housing, rising housing costs and increased risk of homelessness.

### **Mid-Fife continues to be an area of strategic concern**

Mid Fife continues to fall behind other areas of Fife, with poverty a contributing factor. Poorer outcomes for local communities are firmly grounded in place, particularly in parts of Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath areas.

### **Population growth has stalled, the population is ageing**

Fife, like Scotland, has experienced a number of decades of steady growth in its population. Unfortunately, Fife along with many other councils in Scotland, expects to see its population decrease in the next few years. Fewer children, fewer working-age adults and more older people (particularly the very old) will have implications for service demand and the cost of providing future public services.

## **Older people likely to live longer in poorer health and risk exclusion**

Although people in Fife are living longer, more are now living with ill health for longer, particularly women where there is a marked decline in healthy life expectancy. This places a greater demand on health and social care services. There is also an increased risk of digital exclusion and poor digital literacy in older people as more services move online.

## **Mental wellbeing is declining**

Mental wellbeing of Fife's population continues to decline with an increasing percentage of the population being prescribed drugs for anxiety, depression or psychosis. There is some sign of recovery from the pandemic in terms of people feeling life is worthwhile, but levels of happiness are continuing a downward trend.

## **Children and young people are a key concern**

Child poverty continues to be a challenge, linked to lower achievement of development milestones, lower school attendance, poorer attainment and poor health and wellbeing outcomes. 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 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. Pupils experiencing feelings of anxiety is an area of concern in the recent 2023 Fife Health and Well Being survey.

## **Place outcomes show growing need for improvement**

The places in which we spend the most time shape our opportunities and interests. Community perceptions of place are going in the wrong direction over time, with more improvement needed now across all the different aspects of places, but particularly resources (services and support, work and local economy, housing and community) and stewardship (care and maintenance, influence and sense of control).

Fife's urban rural composition leads to variation in physical and digital connectivity. Although areas of increased deprivation have better access to services this is linked to them being urban and does not reflect the socio-economic barriers to access. As more services move online, the need for consistent, reliable digital connectivity increases, as does the risk of people becoming digitally excluded due to the cost of living crisis and ageing population.

## **Addressing the impacts of climate change is a strategic priority, cutting across services and outcomes**

Addressing the impact of climate change is a major challenge, and a key strategic risk for Fife. Consequences of climate change are evident on multiple levels impacting flooding, food and water availability, air quality, biodiversity, with careful consideration required to implementing mitigation measures to ensure potential risks are minimised. Those at highest risk of climate change hazards are often those that are least able to adapt. Factors impacting vulnerability include age, poverty, pre-existing health conditions, limited mobility, as well as specific locations and industries being adversely affected. Moving towards a fair and sustainable Fife requires improved evaluation of climate change risks, to help prioritise resilience action.

# People

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### 3. Population

Total population	Children (0-15 years)	Working age (16-64 years)	Older adults (65+ years)	Households
<b>371,340</b>	<b>61,621 (16%)</b>	<b>229,225 (62%)</b>	<b>80,494 (22%)</b>	<b>169,573</b>

(NRS Mid-year 2022 Population Estimates and Scotland’s Census 2022 (Households))

Unlike in the last several decades, where Fife and Scotland have seen their populations steadily increase, the next few decades will see these populations reduce in size. Fife is one of many Scottish council areas where population is starting to reduce.

The most pressing challenges facing Fife from population changes are:

- a continued decrease in the number of children,
- a diminishing supply of young people entering the workforce,
- a considerable reduction in the number of overall working age people, and
- a continuing increase in older people, particularly the over 85 age group, making up a larger proportion of the overall population.

Scotland’s population is estimated to peak and then reduce from the early 2030s, whereas Fife’s population is expected to reduce sooner, in the next couple of years, and at a faster rate than Scotland, with an estimate of around 8,000 (-2%) fewer people by 2044 (based on 2018 projection figures).

Fife’s population is now 371,340 (Mid-2022 Population Estimates based on 2022 Census). 18 council areas (including Fife) had over-estimates of their populations from 2021. Fife’s population has been overestimated by around 2,900 people. Most population reduction will apply to children and working age groups. In the next 20 years, the number of children will reduce by 11,000 (-17%), and adults of working age by 23,000 (-10%). Migration policies following on from Brexit, and tighter restrictions on non-EU workers due to come into force in Spring 2024, will further decrease mainly younger working age numbers.

Older age groups (65+) will increase in size across all areas with Fife expected to see an increase of around 26,000 (34%), and the 85+ group estimated to nearly double in size.

One of the main drivers of the overall reduction in population is record low levels of births. Total fertility rate has reached its lowest ever level of 1.28 (2.1 needed for population replacement). This not only reduces the number of children, but also has knock-on effects for the working age population, as lower fertility rates result in a reduced working-age population over time.

While the numbers and proportions of older people are expected to continue to rise, mainly driven by the post-war baby boom generation getting older, life expectancy has stalled, and in some areas is reducing in Fife and Scotland. As a consequence, it is expected that Fife’s older population will continue to increase until the late 2030s, where it will level out and start to decrease, but at a more modest rate.

A reducing population - with fewer children, less working-age people and more older people (particularly the very old) - will have implications for service demand and the cost of providing future public services.

## 4. Housing

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In March 2024, Fife Council became the fourth Scottish local authority to declare a housing emergency. Fife, like many regions in Scotland, is grappling with a number of housing pressures: rising housing costs, increasing homelessness, lack of affordable housing, and cuts to funding.

There continues to be a shortage of affordable homes in Scotland compared to the amount of people that need one. This strain on supply comes at a time when the need for social homes is on the rise. Social rents are at least half the level seen in private rented sector.

In 2023, the average rent for a two bedroom property in Fife was £700 per month, compared to the Scotland average of £841<sup>1</sup>. While average rents in Fife have been lower than the Scotland average in each year since 2010, over that period, Fife has seen increases in average rents above the rate of inflation for all property sizes (except one bedroom properties). While inflation has fallen substantially recently, the impact of interest rates on mortgage costs has yet to be felt, with private landlords likely to pass any increased costs on to private tenants. Support measures introduced to tackle the cost of living crisis, including rent freeze and eviction ban have come to an end, with private tenants likely to face big rent rises and potential evictions from April 2024. The removal of private accommodation from the rental sector has also increased pressure.

Many councils are regularly breaching their legal obligation on temporary accommodation as they increasingly struggle to find any accommodation for people they have statutory duties to house, with homeless households being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer periods. Poverty continues to be a key driver of homelessness.

There has been a 1%<sup>2</sup> increase in homelessness applications in Fife since March 2020. This increases to 5%, if examining the change in applications in the last year alone. As of March 2024, there were 1,938 live homelessness cases where households were awaiting housing. Between 2023-24, a resolution for 81% of unintentional homeless households, was found in the social housing sector, an increase from 76% recorded the previous year. This demonstrates the increased pressure placed on social housing providers to source permanent accommodation for homeless households.

Between March 2020 and March 2024, the number of households in temporary accommodation in the area increased by 110%, rising from 525 to 1,100. As at March 2024, 387 children were living in temporary accommodation, up from 315 in 2020. Between 2023 and 2024 there was a 36% increase in households in temporary accommodation, however the number of children in temporary accommodation decreased by 5.6% over this period.

At March 2024 there were more than 14,000<sup>3</sup> applicants on Fife's Housing Register. This is an 11% increase since March 2020, however, a 1.5% reduction has been recorded in applicants on the housing register between March 2023 and March 2024. Over 53% of applicants have an illness or disability, with several indicating the requirement for specialist or supported accommodation to meet the needs of the household. In terms of household composition, the largest proportion of applications are from Single households (39%). 21% of applications are from retired households.

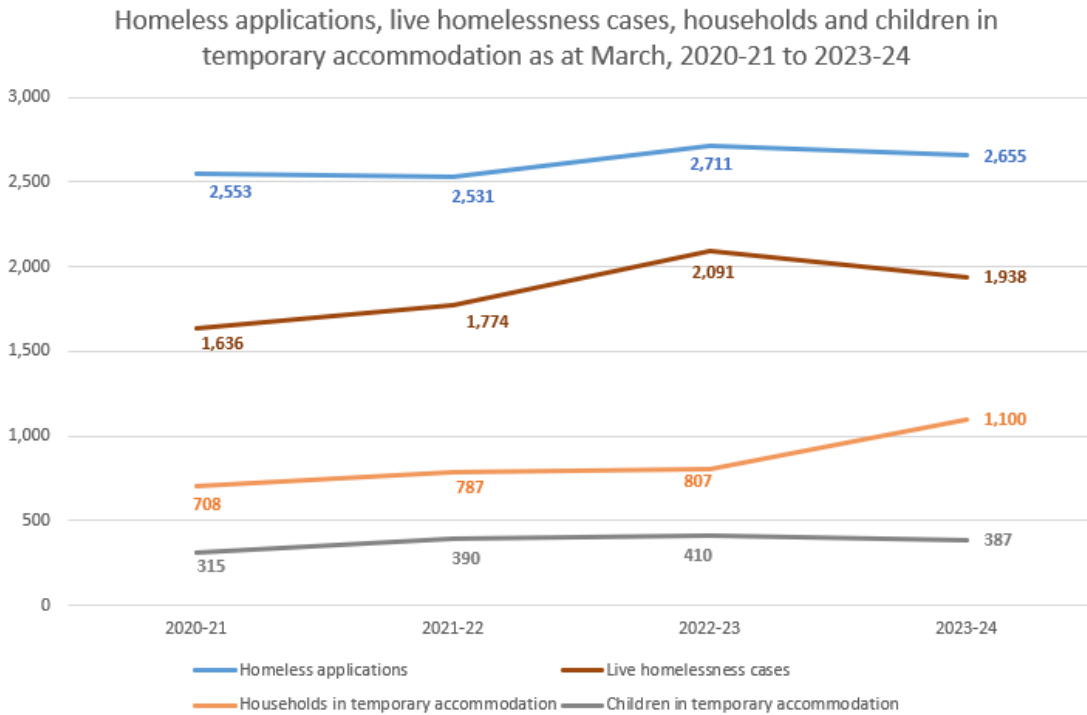
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<sup>1</sup> [Private Sector Rent Statistics, Scotland, 2010 to 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-scotland-2010-to-2023/pages/1-introduction.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [Main+tables\\_homelessness+in+Scotland+2022-2023.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.live.com/tables/homelessness-in-scotland-2022-2023)

<sup>3</sup> [Housing+Lists+-+2023.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.live.com/Housing+Lists+-+2023.xlsx)





**Figure 4.1 - Homelessness applications, live homelessness cases, households and children in temporary accommodation as at March, 2020/21 to 2023/24**

As of 2022, there were an estimated 2,421<sup>4</sup> long-term empty homes in Fife, a reduction of 18% since 2020. The long-term empty homes equate to 1.3% of total dwellings in 2022. Returning empty homes back into use plays a crucial role in responding to the housing emergency to ensure the best use of existing housing is being made, and to reduce the detrimental impact of empty homes on local communities.

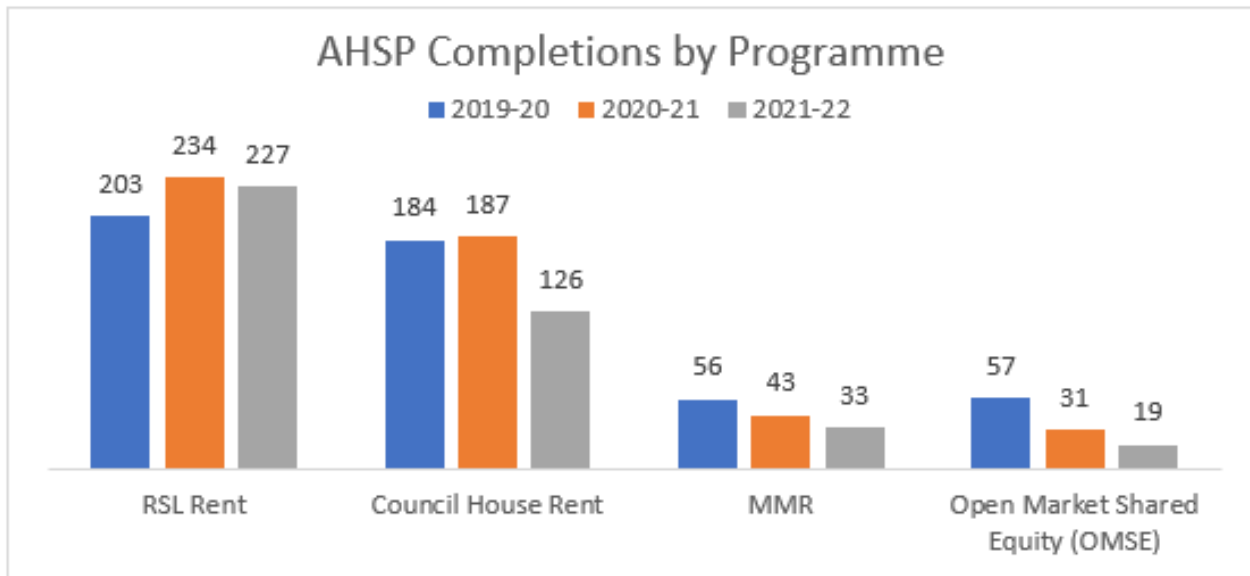
The combined Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDAs) for Fife indicate that 2,392 households are in housing need and require social rented housing to meet that need. The existing need goes beyond the Scottish Government HNDA Tool default position by including households experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, both overcrowded and concealed households and those requiring specialist housing. This existing need informed a range of housing scenarios to calculate housing estimates for both the affordable rent and market rent housing. The agreed scenario for Fife was steady growth which estimates 673 new homes (401 affordable, 272 market) are required each year from 2021-30. The requirements by tenure, over a 10-year period, are shown within the table below:

**Table 4.2 Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDAs) Housing Estimates per annum by Steady Growth Scenario and Tenure (2021-30)**

Affordable (per annum)			Market (per annum)			Fife Total (Market & Affordable)
Social Rent	Below Market Rent (MMR)	Total	Private Rented Sector	Buyers	Total	
321	80	401	104	168	272	673

<sup>4</sup> [house-est-22-data.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.fife.gov.uk/house-est-22-data.xlsx)

Over recent years, new build social housing has been delivered at scale to ensure housing need is met. Between 2019-20 and 2021-22, 1,400 new builds have been completed in Fife through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. Completions comprise of registered social landlord rent, council rent, mid-market rent and open market shared equity. Future delivery is threatened by sizable cuts to the levels of funding available for the affordable housing programme in Scotland. This, together with pressures in the local housing system, has led to a number of councils declaring a housing emergency.



**Figure 4.3 Affordable Housing Supply Completions by Programme (Source: AHSP Out-turn reports 2019-20, 2020-21 & 2021-22<sup>5</sup>)**

With the mandate to improve the energy efficiency of social housing to achieve net zero, there is a risk that much of the existing housing budget could be diverted into the pressing need to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes. This will require significant funding, impacting on future HRA (Housing Revenue Account) spending without increasing the capacity of the housing stock. Another risk is that private landlords may withdraw their properties from the rental market to avoid making required improvements to meet legislation, which will put further pressure on the availability and affordability of housing in the area.

There are also broader concerns about both the speed at which new housing is being built, and the fragility of the construction sector. As well as skills shortages (partly caused by Brexit), construction costs and inflation have contributed to problems building and financing housebuilding. In 2022-23 there were 1,544 new homes completed in Fife<sup>6</sup>. While this was 431 more homes than the previous year, it was only 89 more (6.1%) than 2019-20. This compares with an increase of 7.9% across Scotland, which is likely to mean that supply of housing in Fife will continue to fall short of demand.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/more-homes/affordable-housing-supply/>

<sup>6</sup> [Scottish Government Housing statistics quarterly update \(March 2024\), All sectors starts and completions](#)

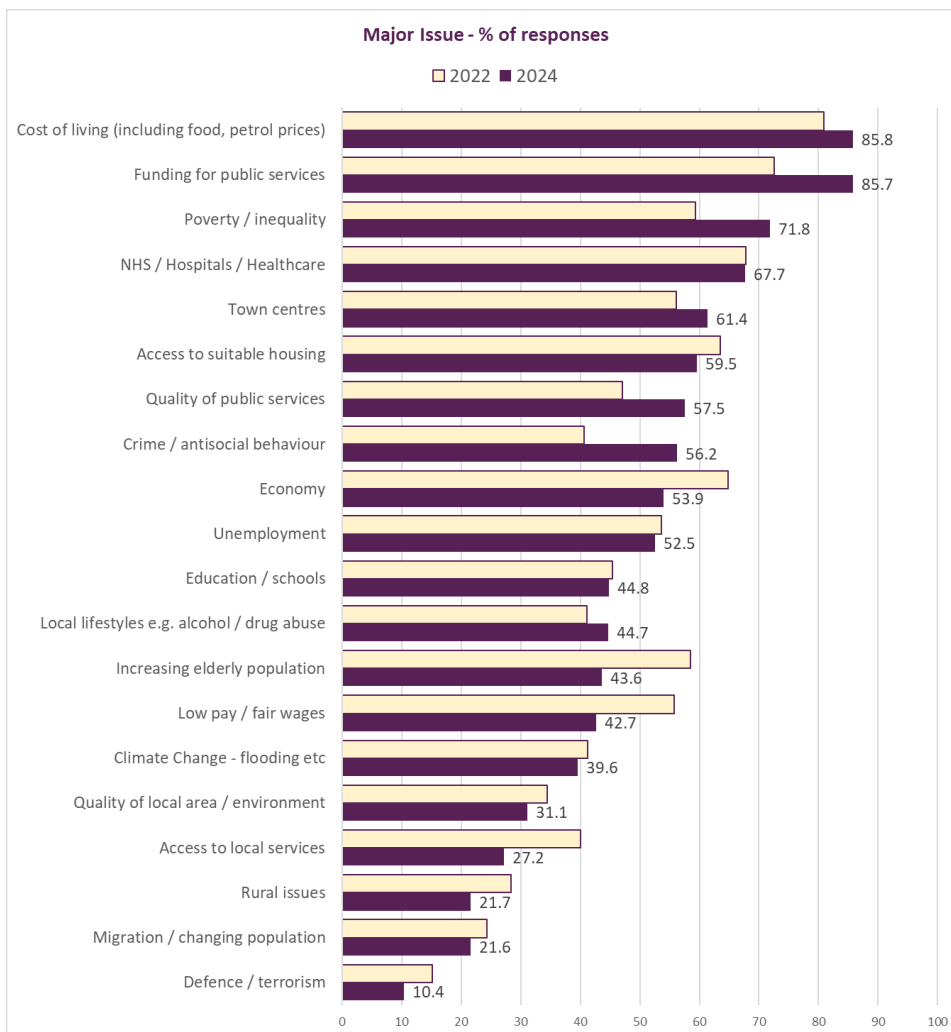
# 5. Poverty

The persistent and lifelong impact of poverty is a central and recurring theme of this assessment. Some households increasingly find themselves with insufficient income to meet their daily living costs.

There are many reasons why a household may find itself in poverty such as unemployment, low paid jobs, inadequate benefits as well as rising living costs. The effects of poverty, such as health problems (both physical and mental), housing issues or low educational achievement, can be detrimental over a person’s lifetime.

## Cost of Living

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the financial vulnerabilities of households to unexpected economic shocks. In 2021 and again in 2024, cost of living was identified by local people as the top issue affecting life in Fife, followed by funding for public services, poverty and inequality (Issues Barometer, Fife People’s Panel).



**Figure 5.1 – Community perceptions of what is a major issue in the area (Fife People’s Panel, Local Issues Barometer, 2024 vs 2022)**

Over the last two years, everyone has been affected by the cost of living crisis with rising energy and food bills driving inflation, and putting pressure on living standards across the UK. Those on the lowest incomes have been hardest hit.

Fewer Fifers now feel they are managing well financially (51% compared to 58% pre-pandemic). Those in the most deprived areas of Fife are six times more likely to not manage well than those in the least deprived areas of Fife.

**Table 5.2 – How households are managing financially, most and least deprived for Fife, compared with Fife and Scotland (Scottish Household Survey, 2023) <sup>7</sup>**

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Scotland
Manages well	38%	66%	51%	50%
Gets by alright	51%	32%	43%	41%
Does not manage well	12%	2%	6%	9%

The cost of living crisis is not yet over. Across the UK, around half of adults reported that their cost of living had increased over the last month (ONS, March 2024), citing rises in the price of food shopping (93%), gas and electricity bills (66%) or fuel (59%) as the main reasons for this<sup>8</sup>. Households now have less financial resilience than they did pre-pandemic, with households likely to have dipped into savings to meet increased living costs. Since 2020 there has been an increased need for short-term credit to meet household costs<sup>9</sup>. Food and fuel bills remain higher than they were pre-pandemic.

Cost of living payments, which offered targeted support to the poorest households, ended in February 2024. From April 2024, although benefits have risen in line with inflation, it is expected that incomes for the poorest will fall further, with rising housing costs being a key factor in this<sup>10</sup>.

## Child poverty

Fife continues to track just above Scotland for child poverty (a proxy for household poverty). 23.6% of children in Fife are now living in relative poverty (in households with an income of less than 60% of UK median income<sup>11</sup>) compared to 21.3% for Scotland (DWP, FYE 2023).

While both Fife and Scotland have seen an increase in child poverty between 2019 and 2023, this had been projected before the cost of living crisis so was not unexpected.

Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy, Cowdenbeath and Glenrothes Areas all have higher child poverty rates than Fife as a whole. This is broadly consistent with income and employment deprivation (SIMD 2020).

<sup>7</sup> [Supporting documents - Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-documents-2022-23/pages/key-findings-2022-23.aspx).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritainhouseholdfinances>

<sup>9</sup> [Demos](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Resolution Foundation](#)

<sup>11</sup> [https://data.gov.scot/poverty/index.html#Poverty\\_measures](https://data.gov.scot/poverty/index.html#Poverty_measures)

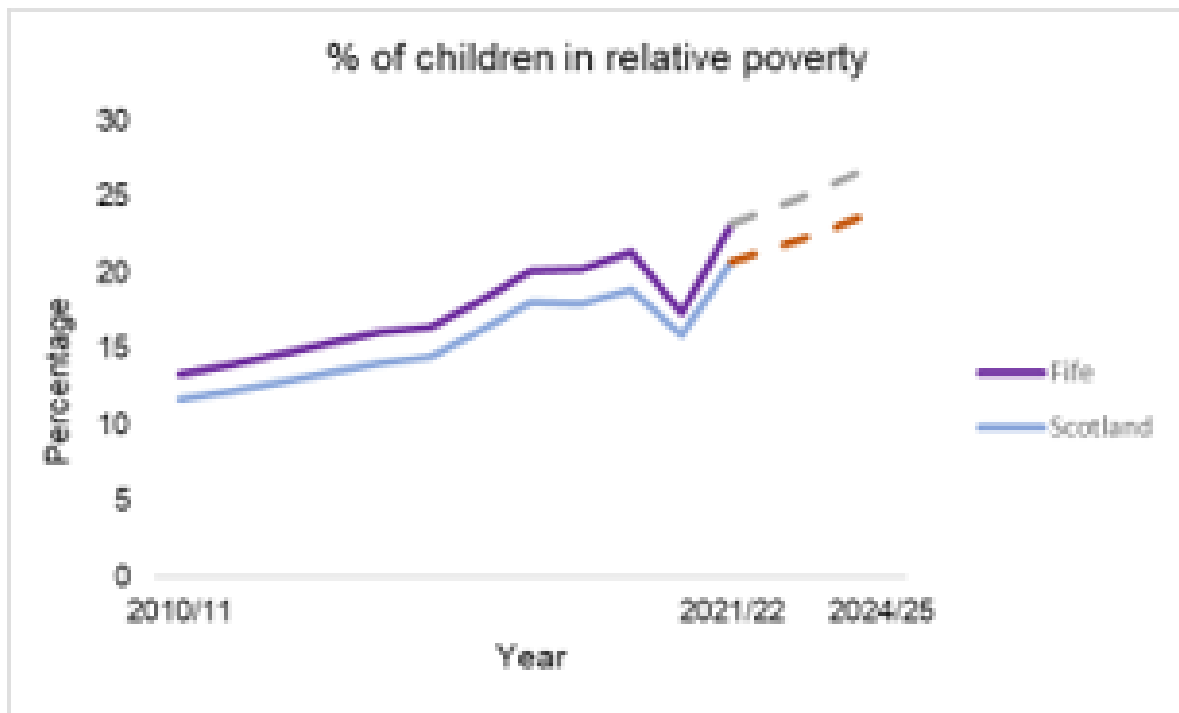


Figure 5.3 - % of children in low income families (2010/11 - 2024/25, CPOP<sup>12</sup>)

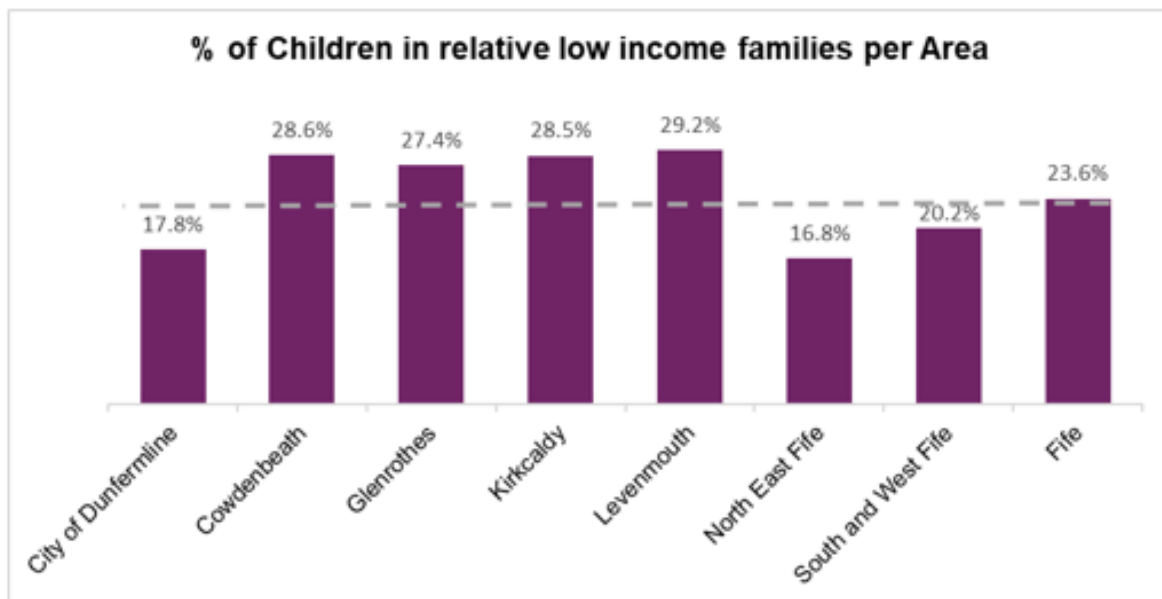


Figure 5.4 - Percentage of children in low income families (relative poverty) by Area (DWP, FYE 2023)

<sup>12</sup> CPOP ([shinyapps.io](http://shinyapps.io))

## Low income households

As at February 2024, there were an estimated 31,285 low income households in Fife (LIFT dashboard). Table 5.4 shows that single households are the largest group, accounting for two thirds of all low income households, and 89% of those who are in a cash shortfall (expected take-home income less than expected expenditure). Lone parents are the second largest group (17.5%), followed by couples without children (9.8%). Couples with children account for 5.1% of low income households.

**Table 5.4 - Financial resilience of low income households by type (LIFT, February 2024)**

	Coping	Struggling	At Risk or In Crisis (cash shortfall)	Total
Couple with children	1,559	9	35	1,603
Couple without children	2,868	73	131	3,072
Lone parent	5,239	49	176	5,464
Single	17,625	719	2,802	21,146
All Low Income Households	27,291	850	3,144	31,285

## Welfare reform

Since 2010, there have been substantial reforms to the UK welfare system, including the rollout of Universal Credit in Fife from 2017. As of February 2024, approximately 27,507 people in Fife are now on Universal Credit (LIFT, UCDS). Of the 31,285 low income households in Fife as at February 2024, 12,921 have moved to UC, while 7,985 households remain on legacy benefits and are still to transition to Universal Credit. 76.5% of low income households are expected to be better off after transition (LIFT).

Through a process of managed migration, DWP are inviting people on legacy benefits (including Housing Benefit) to make the move to UC. It will be important for households to move in the prescribed window, to ensure that they benefit from transitional protection (worth £3.8 million to both people's pockets and the local economy (LIFT)). The five week wait for new claims to Universal Credit continues to place additional financial pressures on households at this critical time.

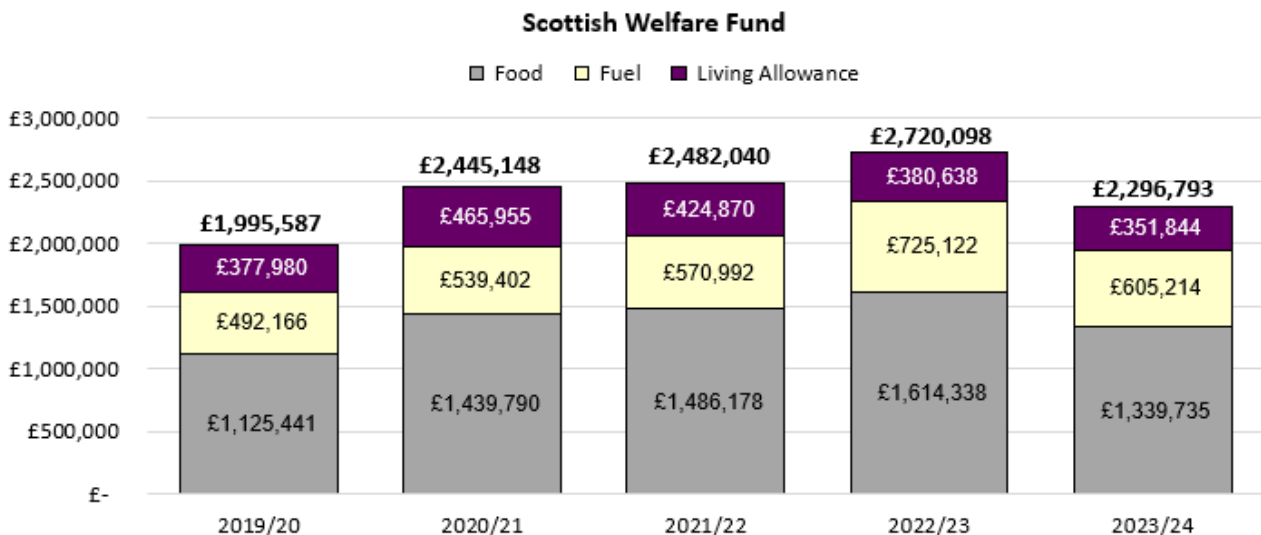
## Food and household support

Public services are facing a number of pressures particularly due to the cost of living crisis, not only due to funding cuts but because of increased pressure on resources as more people require help and those communities have more complex needs.

The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) provides community care grants (to help people live independently and cover items such as furniture, white goods and essential heating expenses) and crisis grants (to help those on a low income with an emergency situation).

Applications reached an all-time high in 2022/23 (37,073) but dipped again slightly in 2023/24 (30,693). In 2023/24 there were more applications for crisis grants (26,309) than community care grants (4,384) with 69% of crisis applications granted.

The amount awarded through the Scottish Welfare Fund for crisis grants increased substantially over the period 2020 to 2023, peaking at more than £2.7 million of crisis support over 2022/23. The amount awarded in 2023/24 has reduced but remains above pre-pandemic levels.



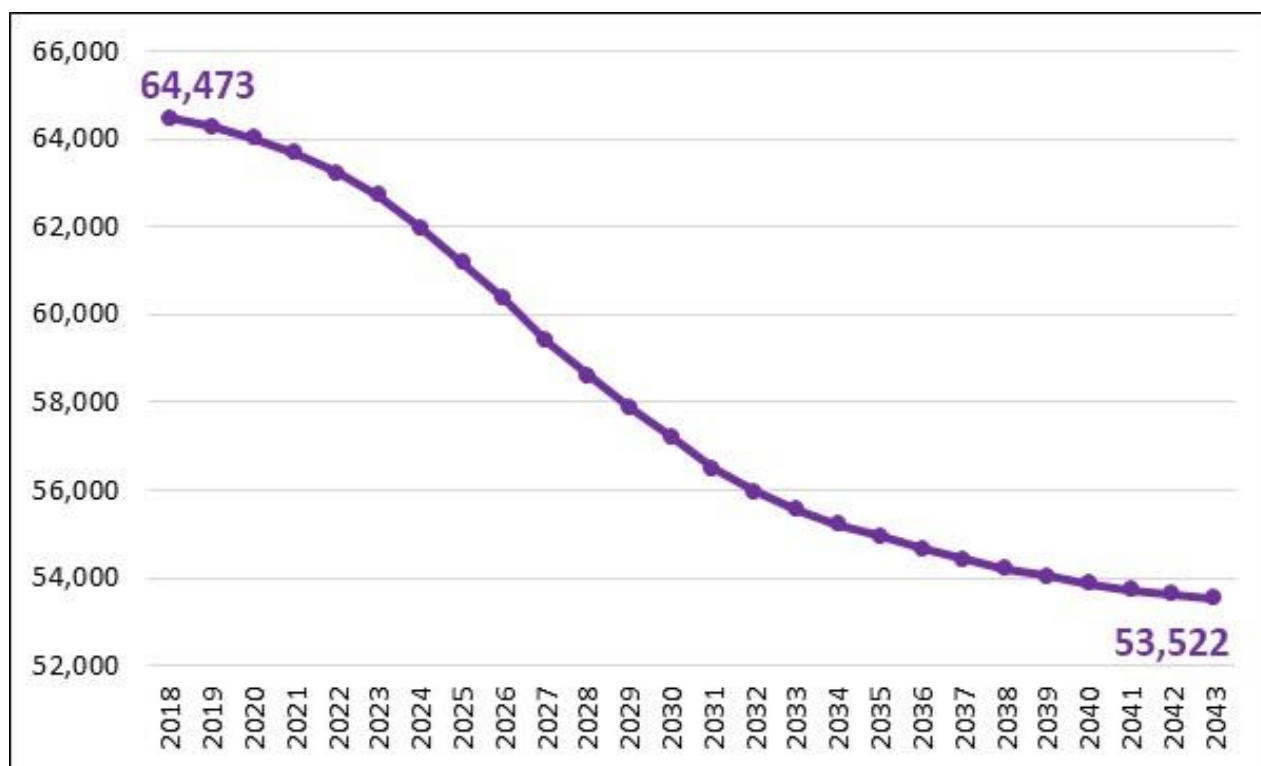
**Figure 5.6 - Crisis grant awards for food, fuel and living allowance, Scottish Welfare Fund, 2019/20 – 2023/24**

## 6. Children and young people

Childhood years contribute to the lifelong foundations of an adult's health and life skills. In recent years young people have experienced the impact of COVID-19 and measures associated with withdrawal of usual activities, services and supports and more recently the cost of living crisis. It is important to understand how Fife young people are doing. This is mirrored in the decision to focus on children and young people in the Director of Public Health Annual report for Fife 2023/24<sup>13</sup>.

The child population of Fife is expected to reduce by around 11,000 (-17%) by 2043. The ages showing the largest decreases are expected in primary school age children (-21%), followed by pre-school (-13%) and secondary ages (-13%). This has implications for service planning and the Fife economy.

### Children (0-15)



**Figure 6.1 - Projected Change in Fife Child Population 2018-2043 (NRS)<sup>14</sup>**

Fife wellbeing indicators developed by Fife Children's Services Partnership are now being used to monitor progress in a range of outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families. Indications are that poverty continues to be a challenge for Fife as a key contributor to poorer health and well-being outcomes for children.

Levels of child poverty vary across Fife, linked to areas of deprivation. As of December 2023, 25,200 of children in Fife (39.5%) were actively benefiting from the Scottish Child Payment. Higher take up in most compared to least deprived areas suggests that the payments are getting to those families who need them the most to mitigate the worst effects of poverty.

<sup>13</sup> [Director of Public Health Report 2023 | NHS Fife](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Population Projections for Scottish Areas \(2018-based\) | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)



## Early years

Health inequalities during pregnancy, birth and early years can have a significant bearing on a child's development and their lifelong health, happiness and productivity in society. The circumstances children experience growing up largely reflect the resources available to their parents or carers, their family income and the environments in which they can afford to live. Early intervention is crucial as the opportunity to reduce the impact of inequalities declines as children age.

One of the poorer outcomes that is being seen for children is in relation to low birth weight. In 2021/22 there was a marked reduction (4%) from the previous year in healthy birth rates. This change has also been experienced nationally at a slightly lower level. This is notable as for the last 10 years healthy birth rates have been sitting around 89% with progress between 2018 and 2020 taking the figure above 90% tracking Scotland at a slightly lower rate.

The Director of Public Health Report 2023<sup>15</sup> notes the science of connection shows that nurture in early years of life is critical for brain development and for lifelong health and wellbeing, and investment in early years has the greatest economic impact. The proportion of young children meeting development milestones tends to track below Scotland. Latest data available from 22/23 confirms that there was 4.3% reduction in Fife children achieving these milestones (81.1%) staying broadly the same as the previous year.

This reduction is notable as previously the percentage of young children meeting development milestone had improved since 2013/14 (81.4%) hovering around 84% across 2018/19-2020/21. Reviews were largely maintained during the pandemic (with the exception of the 4-5 year review). This indicates possible real changes in the occurrence of development problems contributing to concerns.

This is consistent with national trends reported in the Early Child Development report from Public Health Scotland, which reported increases of developmental concerns across all domains and at all review points in 2021/22 compared to the previous year. There are consistently more children in Fife with developmental concerns in the most deprived communities compared to the least deprived communities.

Quality childcare supports economic growth and supports ambitions to reduce child poverty. In 22/23 the quality of early years care in Fife remained good with 94% of funded early years provision graded good or better by the Care Inspectorate. The proportion graded good or better however has been reducing since 2020/21 but remains above the trend for Scotland though this gap is closing.

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<sup>15</sup> [Director of Public Health Report 2023 | NHS Fife](#)

## Educational attainment

In the earliest stages of education, there has been continued recovery shown through improvement in key Primary stage combined attainment since the COVID pandemic.

In 22/23 pupils achieving expected level of literacy was 70% an improvement of 1.9% compared to the previous year. In numeracy 77% of pupils achieved expected levels an improvement of 2.2% since the previous year.

Overall Fife is tracking national trends for key Primary stage attainment but at a slightly lower level.

There are indications that young children are struggling to achieve their full potential in deprived areas of Fife. School closures, lockdown measures and withdrawal of services to essential levels impacted the whole population, with particular effect on children and young people as usual activities had to be put on hold or curtailed.

Pupils' progress and attainment within deprived areas are amongst those who may have been most negatively affected. The attainment gap between most to least deprived areas is measured in percentage points (pp). For primary school at combined key stages the literacy gap is 22 pp, while in numeracy the attainment gap is 19 pp. There has been some improvement in reducing this gap since 20/21, particularly in numeracy.

Interpreting trends in secondary school level attainment levels is difficult due to the different assessment methods during the pandemic. Although 2023 was not yet a complete return to normal, the approach operated on established pre-pandemic procedures with due consideration for legacy of impacts and supports.

**Table 6.2 - School Leaver Attainment in Fife and Scotland, 2022/23<sup>16</sup>**

	1+ at SCQF Level 4 or better	1+ at SCQF Level 5 or better	1+ at SCQF Level 6 or better
Fife	96%	79%	51%
Scotland	96%	85%	56%

For school leavers in 2022/23, around 96% left with 1+ SCQF Level 4 pass or better (equivalent to previous general level standard grade). 79% left with 1+ SCQF Level 5 or better (equivalent to previous credit standard grade or better) and approx. 51% left with 1+ qualification(s) SCQF Level 6 or better (equivalent to previous Higher grade or better).

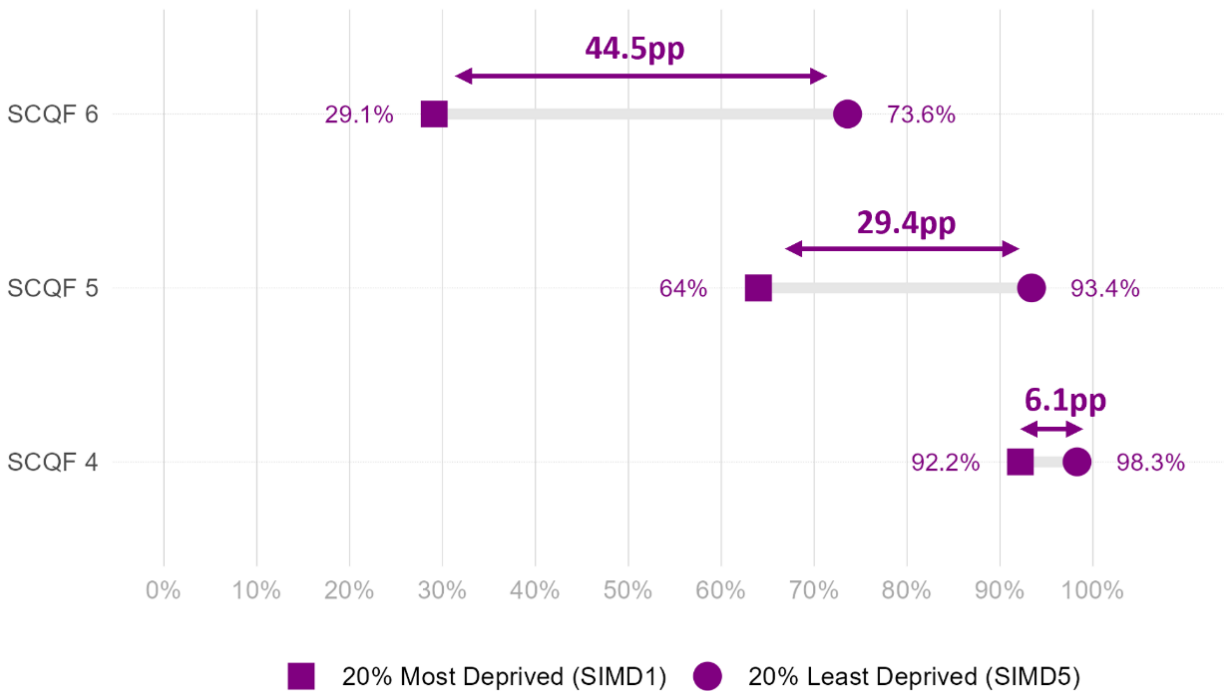
In comparison to Scotland, a lower proportion of pupils in Fife have achieved pass marks in more demanding SCQF levels. When breaking down attainment of Fife school leavers by SIMD quintiles (where 1 is 20% most deprived) the attainment gap between young people from the most and least deprived areas in Fife can be clearly be seen.

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<sup>16</sup> [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 6: 2024 Edition, released on 27th February 2024](#)

## School Leaver Attainment 2022/23

SCQF Level 4 or better, to Level 6 or better: SIMD 1 v 5 comparison



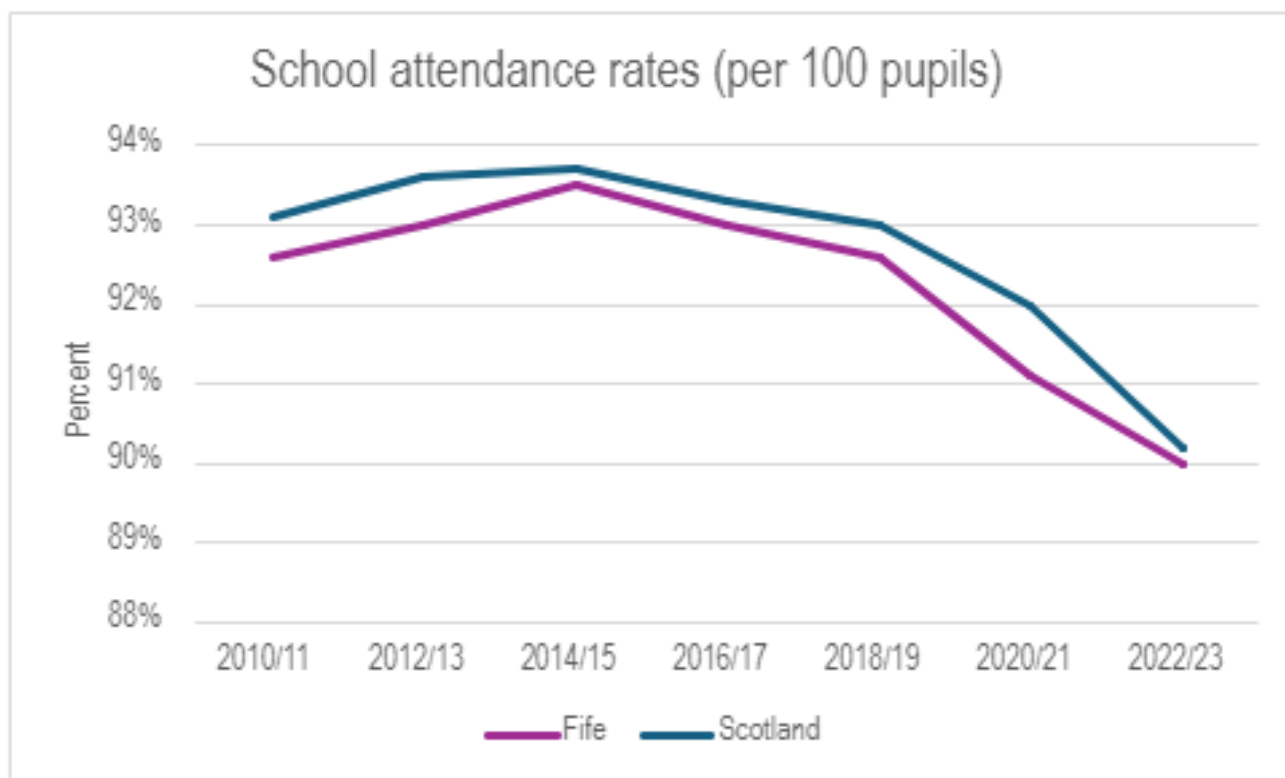
**Figure 6.3 - School Leaver Attainment by SIMD quintile (1=most deprived), 2022/23**

As the level of qualification increases, the gap widens. In achievement of 1+ SCQF level 5 or better there is a 29% gap from most deprived SIMD 5 to least deprived area SIMD 1. In achievement of 1+ SCQF at level 6 or better the attainment gap is 45% from most to least deprived areas. This has implications for access to opportunities in employment and further education. A similar picture is seen at the Scottish level, however the gap is wider in Fife.

The cost of living crisis has created additional pressures on families that will further increase the risk of these issues and is likely to impact on outcomes over the coming years. In Autumn 2023, the Scottish Government announced a key youth policy objective would be a further £200m investment to help schools and authorities improve the attainment of children and young people impacted by poverty. Continued investment may offset some of these socioeconomic issues and reduce this imbalance.

## Attendance

Poor attendance at school has been linked to lower levels of attainment; isolation from peers; emotional and behavioural difficulties and poorer employment opportunities. Overall school attendance in Fife has been declining since 2014/15 to 90% average attendance in 22/23; the trend tracks the Scottish picture but has shown a steeper decline.



**Figure 6.4 - School Attendance Rates (per 100 pupils), 2010/11 - 2022/23**

There is evidence that deprivation does contribute to poor attendance – particularly in secondary school<sup>17</sup>

Review of available research into causes that affect school attendance confirms that this is a complex, multifaceted area that can encompass, individual, peer, family and school issues<sup>18</sup>. Research identifies that these issues can occur across broad categories, which are not in isolation to each other, including:

- illness
- deprivation
- mental health
- pressures of the school environment
- parental attitudes

<sup>17</sup> Attendance Report session 2022/23 [download-document-sharepoint \(fife.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> School attendance literature review 2024 [School-attendance-literature-review-final.pdf \(fife.scot\)](#)

## Young people’s health and wellbeing

Every child has a right to be safe; healthy; achieving; nurtured; active; respected; responsible; and included. This is how wellbeing is defined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The Fife young people’s health and wellbeing survey (2023) was designed to help understand the wellbeing needs of children and young people across Fife and to inform work to improve services for children and families. Across the reported measures, analysis indicates attitudes to school; views on neighbourhood and life at home; physical health and mental health and wellbeing, differ by stage, sex and deprivation. A particular area of concern from the survey was around feelings of anxiety. 50.3% of young people P5-S1 agreed “there are lots of things I worry about in my life” compared to the national figure of 41.9%.

Teachers noted during lockdown a worsening of student’s mental wellbeing; socioeconomically deprived young people were identified as struggling even more so. Loss of socialisation was identified as a significant stressor as well.<sup>19</sup> Young people are struggling with mental health. The referral rate to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) remains greater than pre-pandemic levels, referrals have however started to reduce for the first time in three years. Poor mental health can impact on individual wellbeing, health, education and employment which may limit future opportunities and increase the risk of poverty.

**Table 6.5 – Rate per 1,000 referrals made to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)<sup>20</sup>**

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Fife	35.9	34.2	40.9	38.1	46.9	39.9

From Schools, Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network (SHINE) local authority level on pupil mental health-2022 results, key themes from the data indicate that young people are struggling with self-confidence, loneliness, poor body image and maintaining positive peer relationships.

Of all the school years participating in the surveys, S2 boys and S4 girls are the two where scores are most concerning. Scores show that S4 girls are particularly low in mood, confidence, and emotional symptoms and are most likely to feel lonely with the lowest score relating to peer relationships. S2 boys appear to be struggling more with peer relationships, liking school and feeling pressured by schoolwork (by more than 10% above the Scottish average).

Research into the impact of the use of electronic devices by children is limited. Some evidence suggest that screen time can both support and inhibit development, depending on activities undertaken. Research to determine the youthwork needs in Fife after the COVID-19 pandemic found that almost all young people that participated use social media and a wide range of apps. 29% say using social media is good for you and 27% say it is not. Time spent on social media, the volume of information consumed and access to inappropriate content were all concerns voiced<sup>21</sup>. This area requires further investigation and monitoring at local and national levels.

<sup>19</sup> [ssf letterhead new.fh11](#) Scottish Sport Future Trauma and Poverty

<sup>20</sup> [fife.publichealthintelligence@nhs.scot](mailto:fife.publichealthintelligence@nhs.scot)

<sup>21</sup> The youth work needs of young people in Fife after the coronavirus pandemic

The research found that young people felt physically healthy, over half reported positive mental health although this was a concern for some. Concerns were also raised about poverty and inequality in Fife as well as cultures on bullying and extreme behaviour.

Young people require more support in Fife. The number of Fife pupils that require additional support in schools has significantly increased in recent years. Pupils with at least one additional support need (ASN) has increased by 4,052 in the last five years, a 15.2% increase. The rate of pupils with additional support needs in Fife secondary schools is approaching 50%. Fife tracks the Scottish trends at a slightly higher rate.

In Fife secondary schools the category of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is consistently reported as the highest ASN experienced by pupils. There are a number of factors that have influenced this increase including increased awareness of additional support needs and changes in the descriptors of additional support needs.

Scotland's promise to care experienced young people that 'you will grow up loved, safe and respected. And by 2030 that promise must be kept'<sup>22</sup> is a key priority in Fife. When considering vulnerable children over a three year period (19/20-21/22) there was a downward trend in the proportion of Fife children formally 'looked after'. There is a risk that the continued impact of the pandemic on mental health and the societal impact of the cost of living crisis may create an increase in demand in future years, and close monitoring is important to understand the impacts of this.

## Play

The National Planning Framework 2023 recognises that providing quality opportunities for children of all ages to play will benefit their physical and cognitive development. Fife published its Fife Play Sufficiency assessment in 2023<sup>23</sup> assessing play opportunities as well as needs, demands and aspirations of Fife communities.

Quality of playparks is an issue with 63% of Fife's play parks rated as poorer quality and/or offer limited play value. This is mainly because of missing or dated equipment; or limited by suitability for young age or specific activity e.g. skatepark. Less than 6% of play parks met the criteria of 'High Quality'. These tend to be the destination play parks within Fife's larger towns.

Play parks are only one element of outdoor play, and assessments of settlements showed that most villages had sufficient play opportunities, but most towns didn't. Time spent playing outside is varied - 68% of children and young people said they played outside every day or 2 or 3 times a week; 11% only played outside once a month or not at all. Slightly more than half of children and young people felt that places to hang out and play in Fife were good. While slightly less than half of adults felt that places for children to hang out and play in Fife were good.

In more rural locations in Fife, it was often necessary to travel for more varied or exciting play opportunities. For many families this meant being able to drive or having access to a car. Young people talked about being excluded from play areas, whether through parental concern, poor design or fears about older adults or children. Young people want better designed play spaces closer to home catering for different needs.

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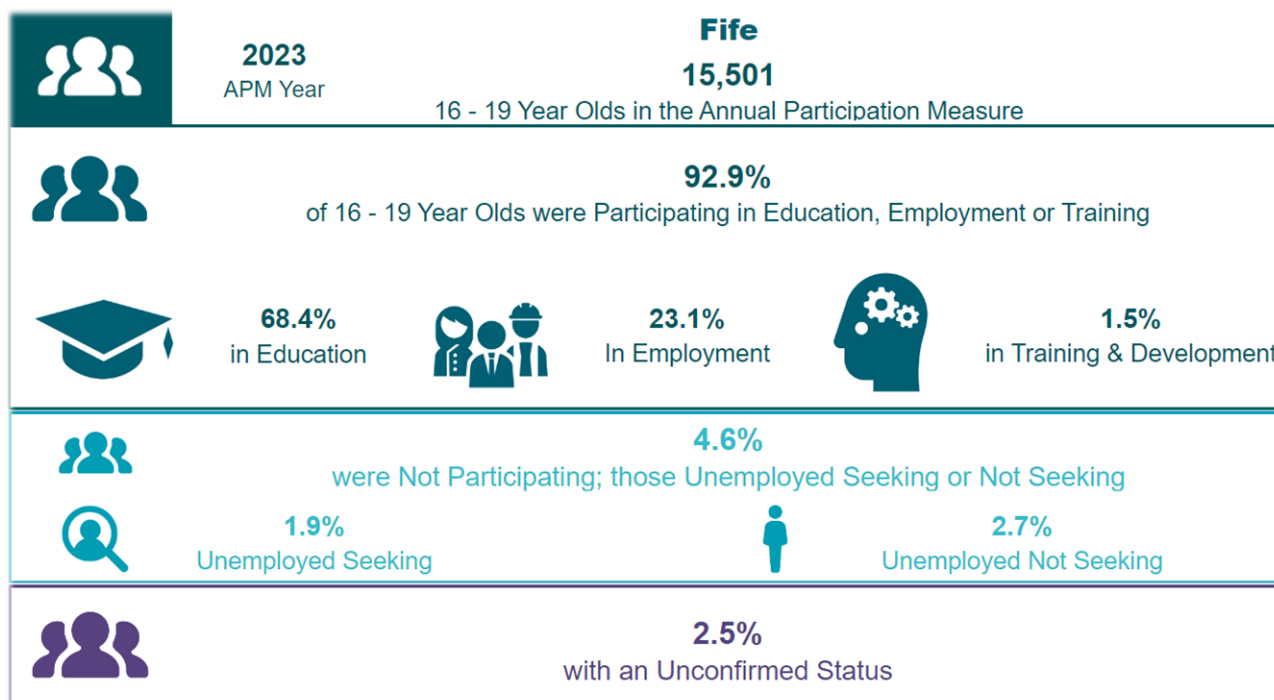
<sup>22</sup> The Promise [The Promise](#)

<sup>23</sup> Fife's Play Sufficiency Assessment 2023 – StoryMap ([FIFE'S PLAY SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT \(arcgis.com\)](#))

## Positive Destinations

Education and training are important phases in young people's lives preparing them and improving their job opportunities, and there is evidence that young people in Fife are progressing positively.

The participation rate of 16-19 years old in Fife engaged in learning, training and work has improved reaching 92.9% in 22/23, which is a growth of 1.2% since 2019/20.



**Figure 6.6 – Fife Infographic for Annual Participation Measure, 2023 (Skills Development Scotland)<sup>24</sup>**

While Fife is tracking Scottish trends on the overall annual participation measure (APM) at a slightly lower rate, there are different patterns to the participation of 16 to 19 year olds in Fife compared to Scotland.

**Table 6.7 – Comparing participation rates of 16 to 19 year olds in Fife and Scotland (Annual Participation Measure, 2023, Skills Development Scotland)**

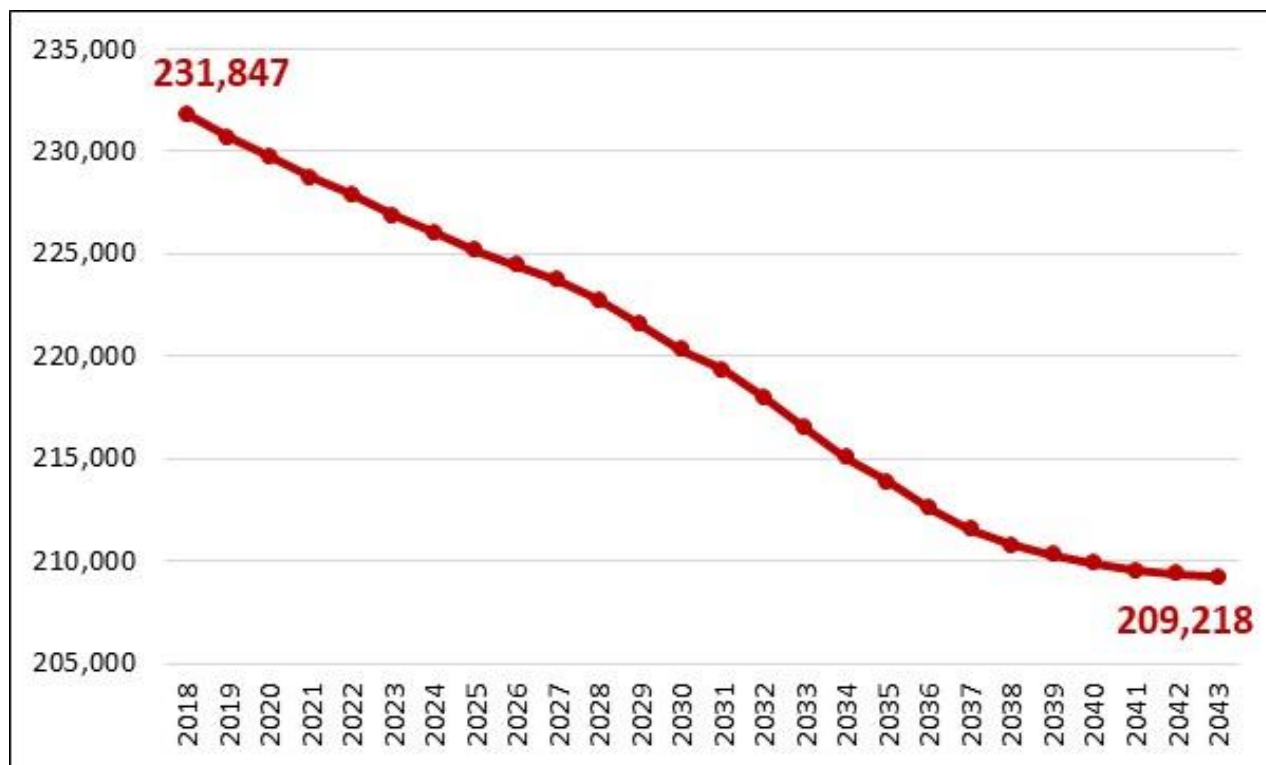
APM	Participating			Not participating		
	Education	Employment	Training/ development	Unemployed seeking work	Unemployed not seeking work	
Fife	92.9%	68.4%	23.1%	1.5%	1.9%	2.7%
Scotland	94.3%	71.3%	21.4%	1.6%	1.6%	2.1%

Positive destinations for school leavers include higher education, further education, employment, training, voluntary work or activity agreements. The proportion of school leavers entering positive destinations has been improving in recent years to around pre-pandemic levels, reaching 95% in 21/22 (94% in 2018/19). Fife tracks the Scottish average at a slightly lower rate. While ongoing improvement is projected to 2024/25, Fife is expected to continue to lag behind Scotland.

<sup>24</sup> [Annual Participation Measure - Skills Development Scotland](#)

## 7. Working age

Fife's working age population increased steadily from 1997 to 2011, where it peaked. Since then, the number of working age people has reduced almost year-on-year, and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, with an estimated reduction of around 23,000 (-10%) in the next 20 years.



**Figure 7.1 Projected Change in Working Age Population (16 to 64) 2018-2043<sup>25</sup>**

The ages with the largest decreases are expected in the 16-24 age group (-15%), followed by those aged 45-54 (-12%) and 55-64 (-10%). The main driver for this reduction is decreasing fertility rates. A declining birth rate leads to a smaller number of young people entering the workforce every year, and a reduced working-age population over time.

A smaller number of working age people poses some major challenges for Fife. One of the main challenges is that it restricts economic growth. As the working age population reduces in size, there are fewer workers that can contribute to the area's economic output and this can hamper the growth in the labour market, and lead to a reduction in economic expansion. Fewer working age people also challenges the labour market leading to shortages in some industry sectors and employers finding it difficult to recruit skilled workers. This has an impact on productivity and overall economic performance.

For most of the last two decades, the EU was the major source of work-related migration to the UK. After the Brexit referendum in 2016 visa grants to EU citizens dropped sharply, even before any new migration policies had been introduced. The recent visa rule changes in the UK, set to come into force in Spring 2024, will have further implications for both migrant workers and their families. The UK Government hopes to significantly reduce the number of successful applicants for work visas, which will affect not only the lead applicants but also

<sup>25</sup> [Population Projections for Scottish Areas \(2018-based\) | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](#)



their family members joining them. As a result, the overall pool of migrant workers will decrease, and this will impact both the workforce and fertility rates.

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workforce size and shape is still too early to quantify, there are certain age groups in which it had a major effect. One of the main groups to be affected was people nearer to retirement age, as the COVID-19 pandemic pushed older adults to retire early. This resulted from changes around work demands and practices, and in particular, the shift to working from home, which had a major influence on their attitudes to work life.

## Special populations

Many areas in Scotland have what are termed “special populations” (a community or section of the population that doesn’t follow the same pattern of ageing as mainstream populations), for example, military bases, prisons, large asylum and refugee populations, student accommodation, elderly care homes, etc.

One of these special populations is the proposed super garrison at **Leuchars Military Base**. As of 1 February 2024, the population of the base, including military personnel, their dependents, and civilian staff, was just under 1,900. This makes up around 60% of the population of Leuchars town. In the next five years this population is expected to increase to around 2,700, with a planned increase in the garrison’s size making it one of the largest in the UK. There will be an increased demand for services for service personnel and their families. At a Fife level, this is not particularly significant, but at a local level this can have a major impact on the characteristics of the community.

The primary healthcare, including community mental health of serving personnel is taken care of by Defence Medical Services (DMS) who provide an all-inclusive, comprehensive package of health services. However, in relation to the health of their family members, there is a mixed economy of provision.

The report, *Living in our Shoes*, published in 2020 highlighted the key challenges for families as:

- registering with and accessing GPs and dentists
- waiting lists, particularly for mental health services
- continuity of treatment
- assessments for special educational needs and disability
- the timely transfer of patient records
- variations in healthcare provision in different localities and in the devolved governments

The **student population in St Andrews** is another example of large numbers of people that have an impact on the make-up of a medium sized town.

It is worth bearing this in mind when looking at how an area’s population may change over time. Unlike in a normal population that ages over time, these special populations do not share the same characteristics, as they are replaced by similar aged people within certain time periods, for example, a posting to a military base, or attendance at a university or college for a set period of time.

Similarly, those areas with a large number of elderly care homes can skew the age profile of the area compared with a similar sized area without any care homes.

## 8. Economy

Fife's economy is still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global and national pressures such as Brexit, the war in Ukraine, disruption to supply chains, increases in fuel and energy costs, high rates of inflation and interest rates, and the recent conflict in the Middle East. Figures are only now starting to show how Fife has been impacted by these events, but getting an accurate localised perspective is challenging (data at both the Fife and local committee area geographies can be unreliable or unavailable) and figures must therefore be used with caution.

Not only has there been a persisting cost-of-living crisis, but also a cost-of-doing business crisis. Economic growth in both the UK and Scotland has been and remains subdued. In Fife the number of VAT/PAYE-registered businesses has fallen; there have been fewer new business start-ups, and some have struggled to survive their initial years of trading in such difficult economic conditions. The proportion of Fife businesses surviving the first three years since start-up fell from 60.3% in 2019 to 44.8% in 2022<sup>26</sup>. For the past two years, the number of business closures has exceeded the number of business births, although in the second half of 2023, more businesses started up than closed. The impact has been greatest on micro-companies (those employing 0-9 people) whose numbers fell by 945 businesses (-11%) between 2020 and 2023<sup>27</sup>.

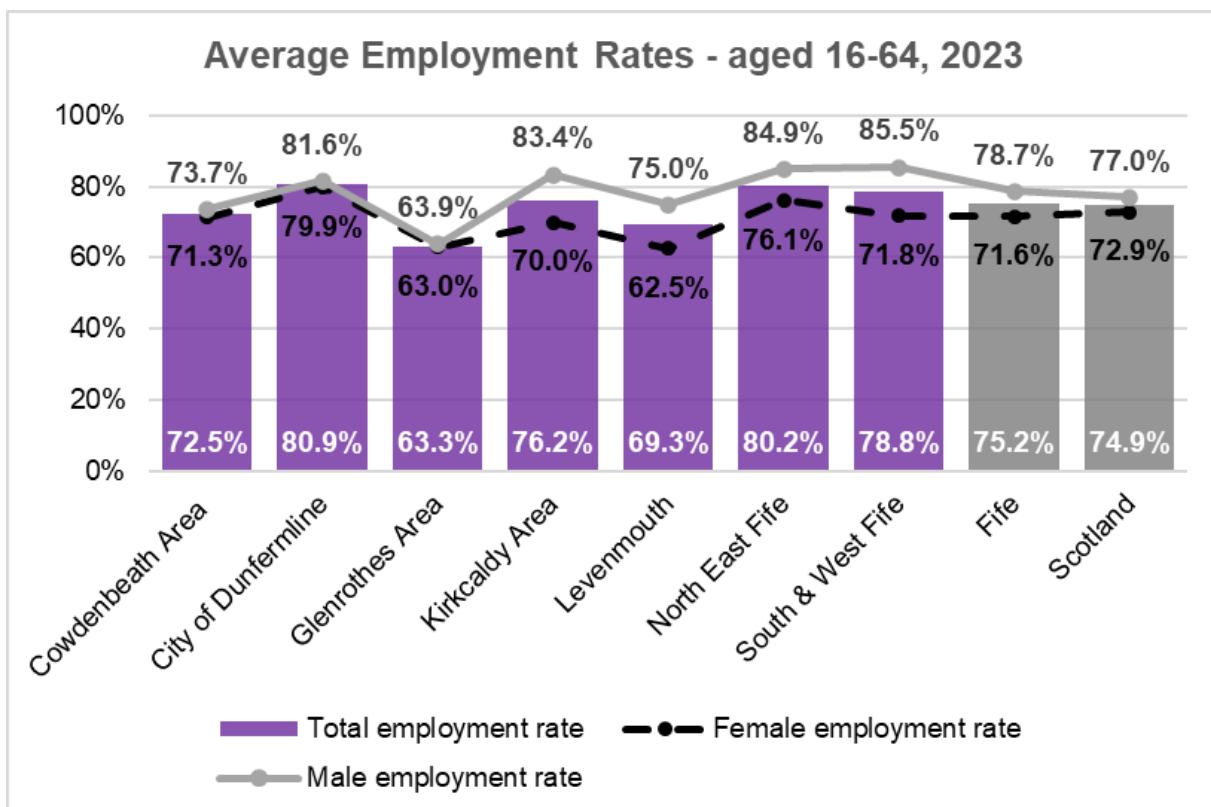


Figure 8.1 – Employment Rates in Fife (averages of the rates in 2023)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Business Demography, UK: 2022, Office for National Statistics

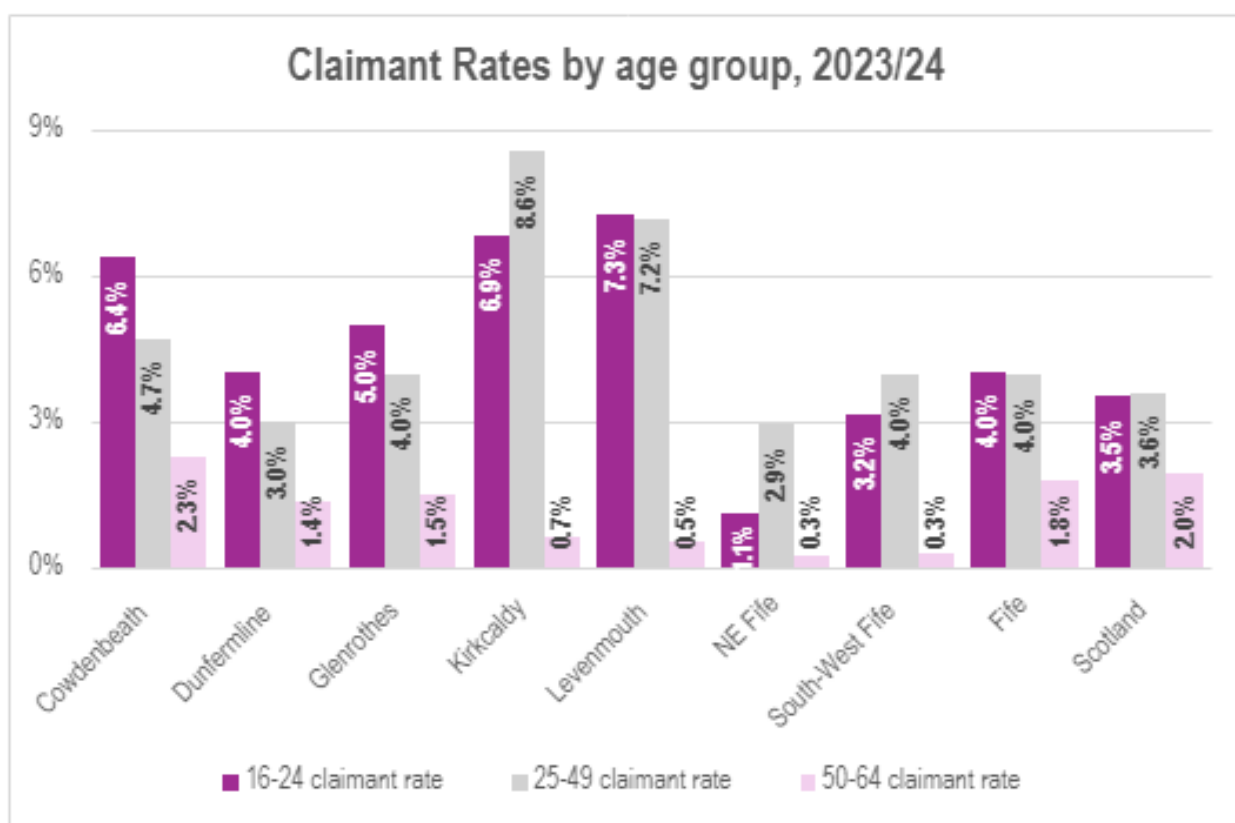
<sup>27</sup> UK Business Counts, Office for National Statistics

<sup>28</sup> Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Fife's overall employment rate is however now higher than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic and in 2023 a larger proportion of Fife's working age population<sup>29</sup> (75.2%) was in work compared within Scotland as a whole (74.9%)<sup>30</sup>. Fife's unemployment rate has fallen to a record low and there are fewer people claiming out-of-work benefits than prior to the pandemic.

Although Fife as a whole currently has a high overall employment rate and low unemployment rate, these figures mask sub-regional variations in the proportion of people in work (Figure 8.1). While only 1.7% of the working age population in North East Fife claim out-of-work benefits (the lowest rate in Fife), there are persistently high rates of people claiming out-of-work benefits in the Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath Areas.

In 2023, Fife saw the proportion of its 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment increase to 92.9%, the highest level recorded. In Levenmouth, Dunfermline and the Cowdenbeath and Glenrothes Areas however, 16-24 year olds have the highest claimant rates of all age groups.



**Figure 8.2 – Claimant rates (out of work benefits) by age group, 2023/24**

Fife's job density is lower than for Scotland as a whole: in 2022 it had 0.69 jobs per working age person, compared with 0.81 jobs in Scotland.<sup>31</sup> The Cowdenbeath Scottish Parliamentary Constituency has the lowest job density in Fife (0.55 jobs per working age person).

<sup>29</sup> Those aged 16-64 years.

<sup>30</sup> [Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Job Density, Office for National Statistics](#)

An Economic Prospectus was produced in 2021 to identify a framework of investment opportunities within Mid-Fife (Kirkcaldy, Levenmouth, Cowdenbeath and Glenrothes). In 2023/24 55% of business start-ups supported by Business Gateway Fife were located in Mid-Fife, with 340 new businesses supported which were expected to create 474 jobs.

The proportion of jobs paid less than the Real Living Wage (a voluntarily wage paid by employers based on the UK cost of living<sup>8</sup>) fell to 11.7% in 2023, the lowest level since recording began in 2015, although higher than the Scottish rate of 10.1%. The average wage of a person living in Fife however was £670.40 in 2023, less than the Scottish average weekly wage of £702.40 which equates to a yearly difference of £1,664<sup>32</sup>.

The number of people able to work in, and contribute to, the economy of Fife – Fife’s labour market - is also of concern. As previously discussed, the size of our working age population is shrinking (see Working Age section). In addition, over a fifth (22%) of those of working age – an estimated 50,000 people - are economically inactive, that is they are neither working nor seeking work. Over a third (around 16,000 people) are inactive due to long-term ill health and 36% are aged between 50 and 64, so at greater risk of never returning to work.

High rates of economic inactivity along with low rates of unemployment restrict the labour supply to employers making it hard for them to fill vacancies and secure and retain staff with the right skills. Understanding the drivers and scale of economic inactivity will help to identify the policy measures needed, both to support more people into work and to provide employers with a skilled workforce able to support their needs.

In common with the rest of Scotland and the UK, the changing dynamics of high street retail are still an issue in many of Fife’s towns. While only 6.1% of retail and service units were vacant in St Andrews town centre in 2023, over a fifth of units were vacant in Dunfermline, Glenrothes, Kincardine, Kirkcaldy and Lochgelly town centres. Burntisland, Cowdenbeath, Cupar and Kincardine all saw the proportion of vacant units fall between 2019 and 2023, whilst over the same period, other towns such as Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy saw the proportion of vacant units rise. Work is still ongoing to support town centres with investment through a ‘town centre first’ approach being one focus in the Plan for Fife 2017-2027.

Tourism continues to be a key sector for the Fife economy and the industry has recovered from the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on travel. In 2023 Fife received 3.2 million visitors – 15% more than the number of visitors in 2019. These visitors brought an estimated £513 million into Fife’s economy, more than prior to the pandemic (visitors brought in £455 million (in 2023 prices) in 2019) and supported an estimated 5,621 full-time equivalent jobs<sup>33</sup>.

Fife is embedding a Community Wealth Building approach as an overarching strategy for its economic recovery and renewal. With a focus on local people and directing wealth back into the local economy, action is being taken to harness the power of anchor organisations (including Fife Council, NHS Fife, and Fife College) to create more local opportunities for good and fair work, to enable smaller businesses to bid for contracts from the public sector, and to make better use of land and assets for the benefit of Fife’s communities.

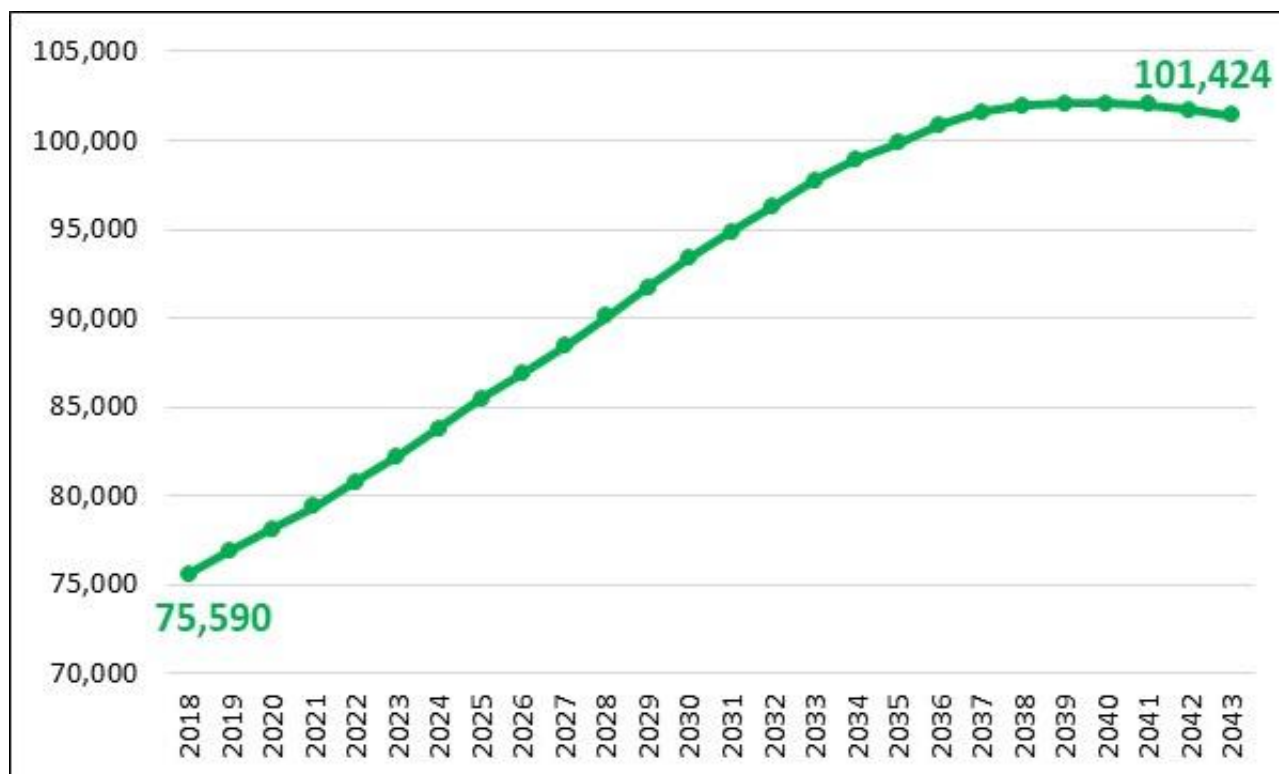
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<sup>32</sup> [Median gross weekly earnings, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>33</sup> Fife STEAM Report for 2012-2023 - Draft, Global Tourism Solutions

## 9. Older people

Fife's population is ageing, and older people (65+) will be the only group to see an increase in numbers in most areas. Over the next couple of decades this group is expected to grow by around 26,000 people (34%), with the over 85s, seeing a near 100% increase.



**Figure 9.1 - Projected Change in Older People Population (65 and over) 2018-2043<sup>34</sup>**

In 2022, older people made up around 22% of the population, and by 2043 they will make up around 28%. This increasing proportion of the population made up of older people contrasts with previous decades. From the 1970s to 2011, people aged 15 and under outnumbered those aged over 65. From then on, the number of older people has been constantly rising and there are now more people aged 65 and over than people aged under 15.

Improvements in life expectancy over the last several decades has been the main driver of increases in numbers of older people. Life expectancy however has been levelling out in recent years, and in some of Fife's more deprived areas has started to reduce. This will mean that although older people will still continue to make up an increasing proportion of the overall population, their numbers are expected to level off around the early 2040s.

Unfortunately, although people in Fife are living longer, greater numbers are now living with ill health in older age for longer, particularly women. This places greater demand on health and social care services.

<sup>34</sup> [Population Projections for Scottish Areas \(2018-based\) | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/population-projections)

# 10. Health and Wellbeing

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Demand for social care services remains one of the greatest challenges facing Fife and in response to this a wide range of health and social care services are delivered across Fife by the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership, NHS Fife, GP practices and third sector organisations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and their communities. It has also increased the demand for social care services, highlighted high levels of inequalities in the health of the population, and changed the way that we all live our lives. The ongoing impact of the pandemic, and unprecedented demand over the winter period, has created increased demand for health and social care services.

Significant health inequalities exist and persist within the Fife population and Fife is committed to delivering a range of actions critical to local recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, within the wider context of addressing inequalities and making a continued shift to early intervention and prevention.

## Life and Healthy Life Expectancy

Life expectancy has stalled in recent years and is in decline. In Fife in 2020-2022, life expectancy at birth was 76.9 years for males and 80.9 years for females (76.5 and 80.7 for Scotland). This is a decrease of around three months for males and six months for females since last year's estimates.

Healthy life expectancy is also reducing, particularly for those in the more deprived areas, who can expect to live shorter lives and spend fewer years in good health. A new-born baby boy is now only expected to live around 59 years in good health, and females only 55 years. For the last 18 years for males and 26 for females, would be affected by health problems. This is a worrying trend for females, where, compared to the Scottish average, they will spend 7 years less in good health (a reduction of 4.5 years since 2018-20 estimates).

In line with the rest of Scotland, life expectancy has now dropped below the 2011-2013 figure, reflecting unprecedented changes in life expectancy trends. Life expectancy is calculated from mortality rates so changes to these will be reflected in life expectancy estimates.

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health's (GCPH) report<sup>35</sup> concluded that austerity made the most substantial contribution to the overall stalled mortality trends in Scotland and across the UK. Additional factors that may be contributing towards these changing trends include:

- stalled improvements in cardiovascular death rates especially in people aged between 55 and 74
- increased drug-related deaths of younger people aged 35-54
- increase in people over 75 dying from dementia
- increased prevalence of obesity

This 'stalling' of improving life expectancy and mortality rates represents an overall UK picture which masks a widening of inequalities.

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<sup>35</sup> [Changing mortality rates in Scotland and the UK - an updated summary original.pdf \(gcpH.co.uk\)](#)

## Health Inequalities

Health inequalities are a consequence of unfair differences in people's living conditions and life experiences (wider determinants of health). Increase in health inequalities for more deprived populations have been observed across the UK since the early 2010s, with austerity evidenced as making an important and substantial causal contribution. Trends in the socioeconomic factors that influence health provide little indication that health inequalities will improve in future, underlined by increasing rates of extreme poverty.

Significant health inequalities exist and persist within the Fife population. The difference in life expectancy between the 20% most and least deprived areas in Fife was 13.7 years for males (was 10.9 years), and 10.5 years for females (was 8.2 years).

The most deprived areas have 36% (was 35%) more deaths and 109% (was 106%) more early deaths (ages 15 to 44) than the Fife average. If the levels of the least deprived area were experienced across the whole population, deaths from all ages would be 27% lower and early deaths would be 72% lower.

Other indicators of Health Inequalities:

- The rate per 100,000 for all causes of premature mortality is 3 times greater in the most deprived areas of Fife (Q1 723, Q5 227).
- The rate per 100,000 for alcohol specific deaths is 4.8 times greater in the most deprived areas and 4.5 times greater for alcohol related hospital admissions.
- Drug related hospital admissions are 20 times greater and 22 times greater for drug-related deaths in the most deprived areas.
- Smoking during pregnancy is 9.4 times greater in the most deprived areas and premature births are 1.6 times greater.

In the 2023 report by the Health Foundation, *Leave No-one Behind*<sup>36</sup>, three specific areas of concern were highlighted, further supporting the information above:

- prevalence of drug-related deaths
- inequalities in health and experiences of infants and children in their early years
- health and socioeconomic outcomes of young and middle aged men

## Long Term Conditions

In Fife, 39% of adults aged 16 and over had a limiting long term physical or mental health condition or illness. This is significantly higher than Scotland (35%) and has steadily increased since 2012-2015 (Scottish Health Survey 2022).

Long-term conditions include cardiovascular, neurodegenerative, and respiratory conditions, as well as other organ conditions (namely liver disease and renal failure), arthritis, cancer, diabetes, and epilepsy.

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<sup>36</sup> [Leave no one behind | Health Foundation](#)

## Health Behaviours

Our own health behaviours play a significant role in health outcomes and the development of a range of both acute and chronic or long-term conditions. Qualitative evidence also suggests that people with multiple disadvantages are more likely to have adverse experiences throughout their lives, from childhood through to young adulthood.

The Scottish Health Survey reports that 61% of adults in Fife are meeting the recommended physical activity guidelines, compared with 66% in Scotland. Fife also shows relatively poorer results when looking at our eating habits (68% of adults in Fife eat less than the recommended portions of fruit and veg per day) and the proportion of adults who are overweight or obese (68% of Fife adults were obese or overweight).

Self-assessed general health measures are similar to Scotland with 70% (72% for Scotland) of adults rating their health as very good or good (72% of males, 67% of females). The profile of our smoking and drinking behaviours mirror the national picture. Smoking behaviour is comparable to Scotland as a whole, with 57% having never smoked or are an ex-occasional smoker, 27% ex-regular or occasional and 17% regular smoker. 22% of adults admit to drinking at hazardous or harmful levels, on par with the Scottish average.

Following a reduction in 2020/21, alcohol related hospital admissions are on the increase and in 2021/22, are now higher than the Scottish average, with 640 admissions per 100,000 (611 per 100,000 for Scotland).

Among young people (11-25 years) Fife has a significantly higher rate of alcohol related hospital admissions than Scotland (Fife 3 year average 2019/20 to 2021/22 is 389.28 per 100,000, compared to Scotland rate of 255.26), there is little sign of this gap reducing.

Smoking in pregnancy is also higher in Fife than the national average. The 3-year rolling average for those recorded as “current smoker” at first antenatal booking was 19.05% in Fife compared with 12.92% in Scotland.

## Prevention and Early Intervention

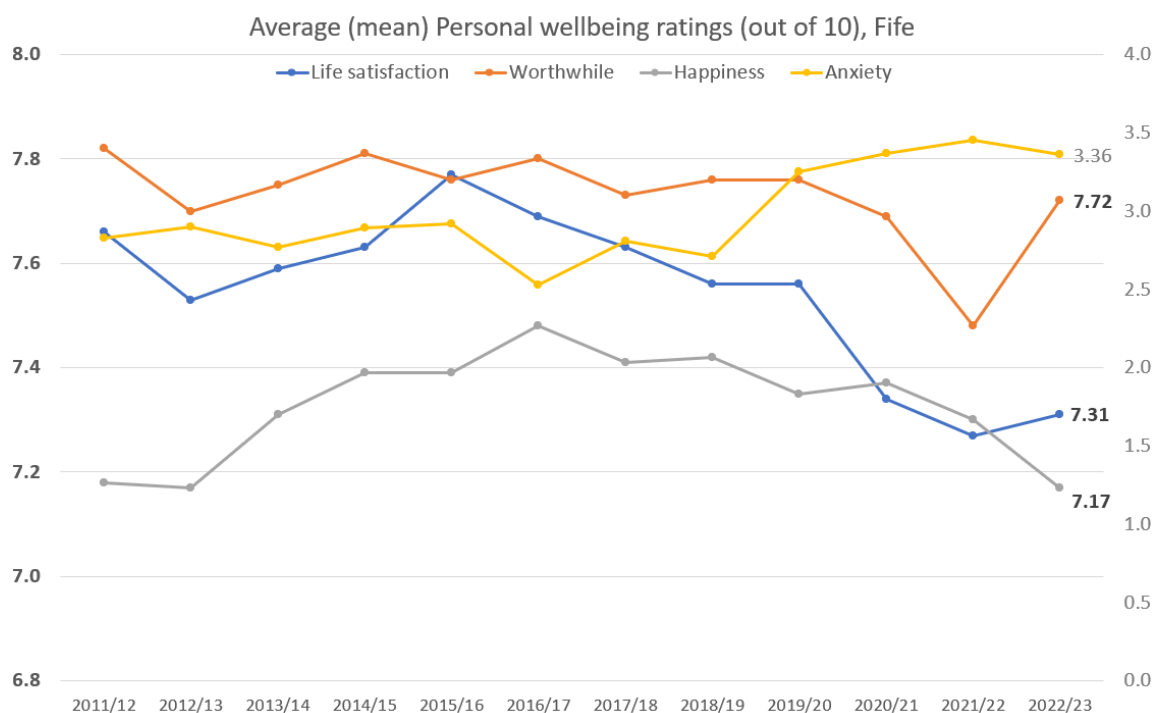
Given the rising cost and increasing demand for health and social care services, there is a continuing shift towards prevention and early intervention approaches. These approaches will aim to improve overall public health and wellbeing by preventing or limiting impact of disease or other social problems. They may be aimed at a whole population (universal) which influence health behaviours or address the social determinants of health (childhood experiences, education, housing, social support, family income, employment, our communities, access to health services).

Interventions can also be targeted to groups with particular needs or that are particularly likely to benefit (such as screening for cancer in those at greatest risk). Importantly, the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership's new Prevention and Early Intervention strategy will look broadly at the prevention and early intervention of health and social problems (such as homelessness, social isolation or functional decline with age).



## Personal wellbeing

While there is some sign of recovery from the pandemic in terms of an uptick in people feeling life is worthwhile, personal wellbeing data for Fife (ONS) shows that there has been only a marginal improvement recently in life satisfaction and levels of anxiety, with happiness continuing a downward trend.



**Figure 10.2 – Average (mean) Personal wellbeing ratings for Fife, 2011/12 to 2022/23 (Personal well-being in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk))**

Loneliness matters for wellbeing because connections with others help people cope with difficulties. Losing connections means less emotional support.

The cost of living crisis is compounding the adverse effects on levels of social isolation and loneliness seen during the pandemic. 81% of Scottish people agreed that the increased cost of living will make more people lonely. 43% said that they would restrict how much they socialise because the cost of living is going up.

Socio-economically disadvantaged people are more likely to experience poorer mental and physical wellbeing, lower life satisfaction, and feelings of loneliness, all of which either have already been impacted by the pandemic or are likely to be impacted by an economic downturn and increased poverty.

Those most likely to be affected are:

- Disabled people or people with long term conditions
- Young people
- People on low incomes
- People who are digitally excluded
- People living alone
- People living in deprived areas or without access to green space

## Mental health

Mental health conditions are a leading cause of ill health, disability and early death. Mental health problems are influenced from an early age by social environment. Half of all lifetime mental health problems start by the mid-teens and three-quarters by the mid-twenties. Adversity and multiple disadvantages in childhood, as well as abuse and neglect, poor parenting, and parental mental health problems, are some of the factors associated with an increased risk of mental health problems in both childhood and adulthood<sup>37</sup>.

The mental wellbeing scores (based on the mean score on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale) in Fife for females (48.3) and males (49.3) are comparable with Scotland. (Overall 48.8 in Fife, 48.9 in Scotland, Scottish Health Survey 2023). This follows the Scottish trend, which shows a continuing decrease in levels of mental wellbeing.

The estimated percentage of the population being prescribed drugs for anxiety, depression or psychosis in Fife is higher than in Scotland (21.32% in 2021/22 compared with 20.14) and, following a reduction in 20/21, is increasing in line with Scottish trends.

Between 2018 and 2022, there were 243 suicides in Fife (13.74 per 100,000, slightly lower than the Scottish rate of 14.5 per 100,000). 180 were male (20.8 per 100,000, below the Scotland rate of 21.6), and 63 were female (6.8 per 100,000, below Scotland rate of 7.4). Death by suicide is over twice as likely among those living in the most socio-economically deprived areas than among those living in the least deprived area. However, suicide deaths in the least deprived areas are at their highest level since 2002/04.

In young people between the ages of 11 and 25 years old, the rate was 10.46 per 100,000, (slightly lower than the Scotland rate of 11.06) from 2017-202. Between 2011-2019, an average of 60% of the cohort had a mental health drug prescription in the period before suicide; 50% had hospital contact and 46% had community contact (e.g. NHS24, GP out of hours)<sup>38</sup>.

## Death and Cause of Death

In 2022, there were 4,560 deaths in Fife. This is a 0.3% decrease from 4,575 deaths in 2021. Of these 4,560 deaths, 2,310 (50.7%) were female and 2,250 (49.3%) were male.

In men, the leading cause of death is Ischaemic heart disease and in females, Alzheimers and dementia. However, if all cancers were grouped together, cancer would be the leading cause of death. The second most common cause of death was cardiovascular disease, followed by neurological disease. By males and females, the leading causes of death were:

**Table 10.1 – Leading causes of death for males and females in Fife in 2022**

Male	Female
Ischaemic heart disease 14.9%	Alzheimers and dementia 13.9%
Alzheimers and dementia 6.5%	Ischaemic heart disease 9.0%
Lung cancer 6.5%	Cerebrovascular disease 7.0%

The figures above do not take into account health inequalities, which result in greater levels of premature mortality in more deprived areas.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/media/1685/efa-mental-health-and-wellbeing-short-evidence-briefing-20180905.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> [Scottish suicide information database - A profile of deaths by suicide in Scotland from 2011 to 2019 - Scottish suicide information database - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

# 11. Safer Fife

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Community safety encompasses a range of issues including crime, antisocial behaviour, public perception of crime, and safety in homes and on roads. This broad remit reflects that community safety issues have the potential to affect all of Fife's population. This makes it important that community safety trends are understood, allowing issues and areas of note to be promptly addressed. Crime and antisocial behaviour are areas heavily linked with community safety, and recent years have seen an increase in the Fife crime rate. 2022/23 marked the third consecutive year where the Fife crime rate per 10,000 population had increased. Perhaps more significantly, this rate of 549 crimes per 10,000 population represented the first time in a ten-year period where the Fife rate exceeded the Scottish figure.<sup>39</sup>

Much of the increase in charges was driven by crimes of dishonesty, with theft of a motor vehicle, shoplifting and fraud crimes all increasing to their highest level in the ten-year period. Between 2021/22 and 2022/23, Scottish shoplifting offences increased from 42 to 52 per 10,000. The Fife increase was from 49 to 77, with only Dundee City (113) and Aberdeen City (79) having higher rates. It is unclear to what extent such crimes of dishonesty – particularly shoplifting – may be linked to the ongoing cost of living crisis.

22,961 antisocial behaviour incidents were recorded by Fife Division in 2022/23, equating to 614.7 incidents per 10,000 population. Analysis has highlighted that fewer than 20% of calls to the police result in a crime being recorded, with Police Scotland increasingly providing support to people experiencing mental health distress.<sup>40</sup>

Unintentional injuries within Fife follow Scottish trend: most prevalent for 0-4 age group and those aged 65+. There is a gender divide in such figures, with males having a higher rate of injury at every age group until the age of 64, when the female injury rate becomes higher, before peaking in the 85+ age group. The female admission rate is 11,634 per 100,000 population, with the male equivalent at 7,579. An upwards trend in fall admissions has been particularly apparent for males aged 85+, with the Fife 2022/23 rate of 73.6 per 1,000 being the highest on record. The Fife Cares service carried out 766 home visits in 2022/23, with Kirkcaldy (157), Glenrothes (156) and Cowdenbeath (124) receiving the most visits.

There were 1,908 Fife fire incidents in 2022/23, the highest since 2009/10. An increase in outdoor fires – particularly grassland/woodland/crops - gave Fife a total primary outdoor fire rate of 111.7, considerably above the Scottish figure of 65.7, and just short of West Lothian's peak rate of 112 per 100,000. While this increase has been evident across every committee area, Kirkcaldy has been most affected.<sup>41</sup>

Violence against women (including domestic abuse and sexual abuse) continues to be a priority area within Fife, with recognition that the effects of lockdown had the potential to increase levels of risk for some women and children. 4,903 incidents of domestic abuse were reported in 2022/23 (down 17% from previous year), still significantly above the 2019/20 figure of 4,525 incidents and appears to be a legacy of the increase seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Scottish rate for 2022/23 was 528 per 10,000. 'Recorded crime in Scotland, 2022-23', (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2022-23/documents/>)

<sup>40</sup> (<https://www.spa.police.uk/spotlight-on/mental-health/>)

<sup>41</sup> 'Scottish Fire and Rescue Service: Fires dataset, 2009/10 – 2022/23' (<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/about/statistics/>)

<sup>42</sup> 2023 annual report, (Fife violence against women partnership, 2023)

# Place

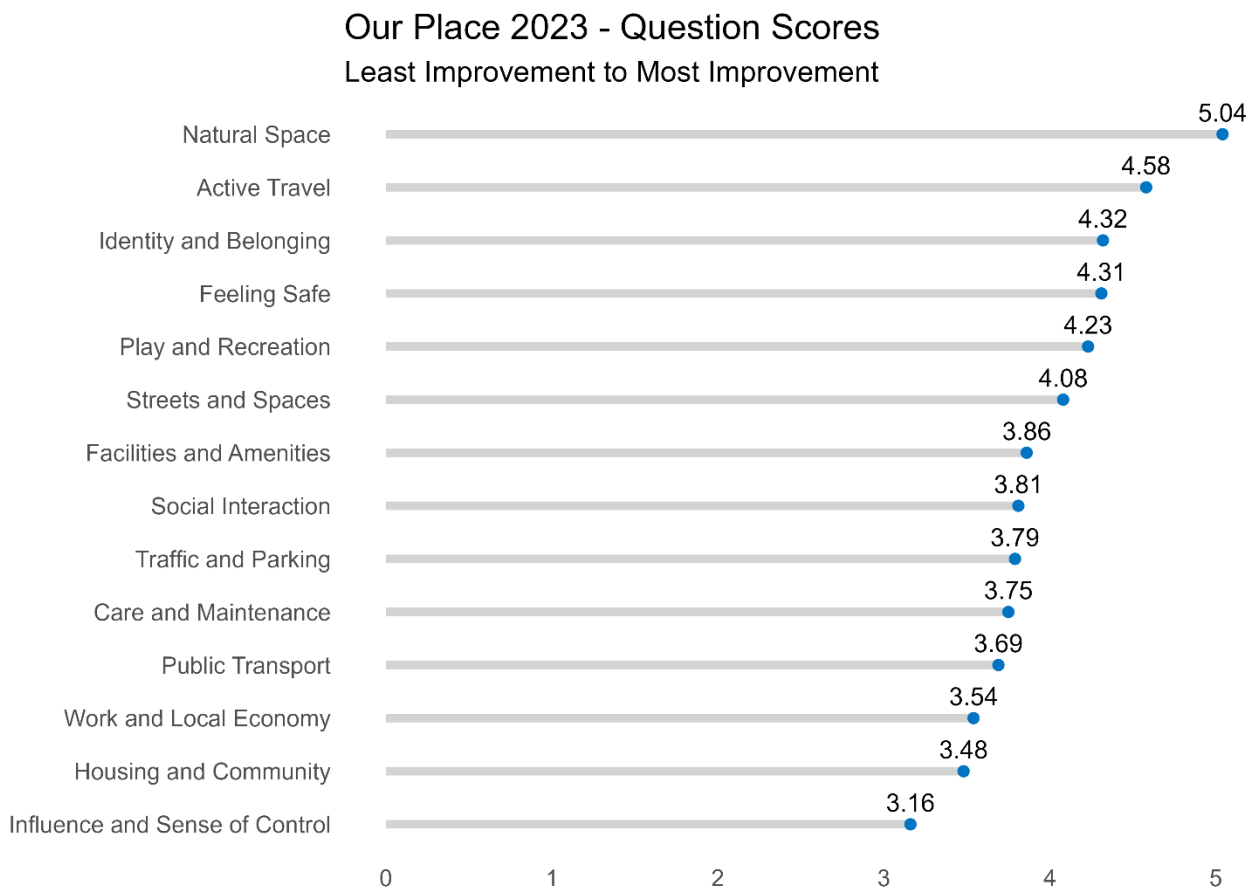
Topic	Page
12. Place and wellbeing	36
13. Connectivity	40
14. Spatial issues	43
15. Environment	45

## 12. Place and wellbeing

Since 2016, to better understand strengths and the need for improvement in places, we have been embedding a structured method for considering places. Our starting point was the Place Standard tool - jointly developed by Architecture & Design Scotland, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government - complementing our place and community-based activities. We have since repeated this process three times, approximately every two years in 2018, 2021 and most recently in 2023<sup>43</sup>.

In the place standard tool, people are asked to rate fourteen aspects of place on a 7 point scale, where 1 is most need for improvement and 7 is little need for improvement.

People in Fife generally view where they live with mixed feelings, seeing it as ok but with growing room for improvement. Overall, Fife is seen as a place with good natural spaces and active travel options but where greater improvement could be achieved in relation to work and the local economy, housing and community and in how they can influence what is going on around them to provide a greater sense of control.



**Figure 12.1 - Our Place 2023 Fife Scores**

<sup>43</sup> Our Place 2023 Report [Our-Place-Fife-2023.pdf](#)

There are similarities and differences in and between Areas

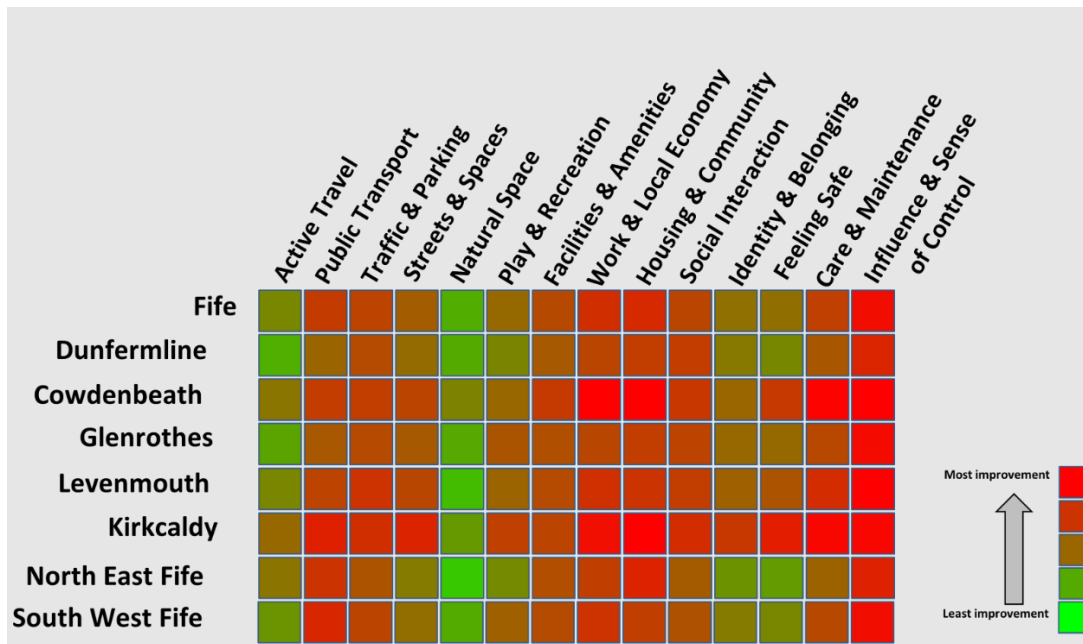


Figure 12.2 - Colour shaded diagram of how different aspects of Place are viewed across Fife

Change over time is generally going in the wrong direction, with community perceptions indicating a growing need for improvement across all the different aspects of place.

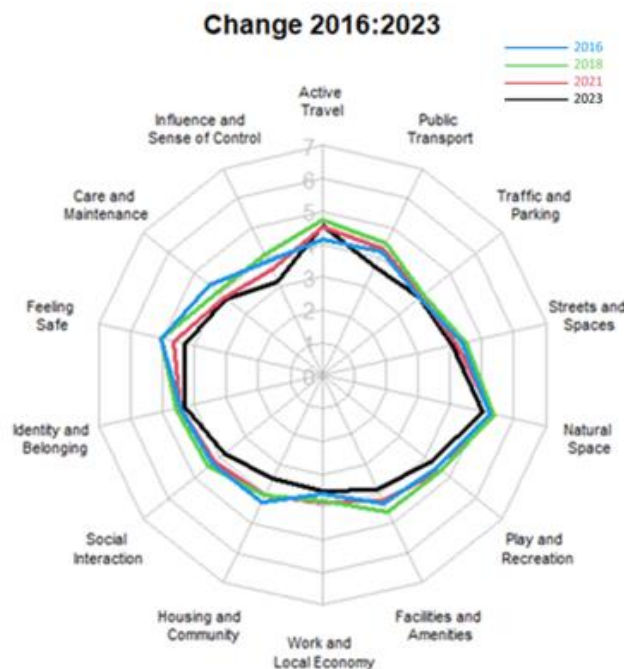
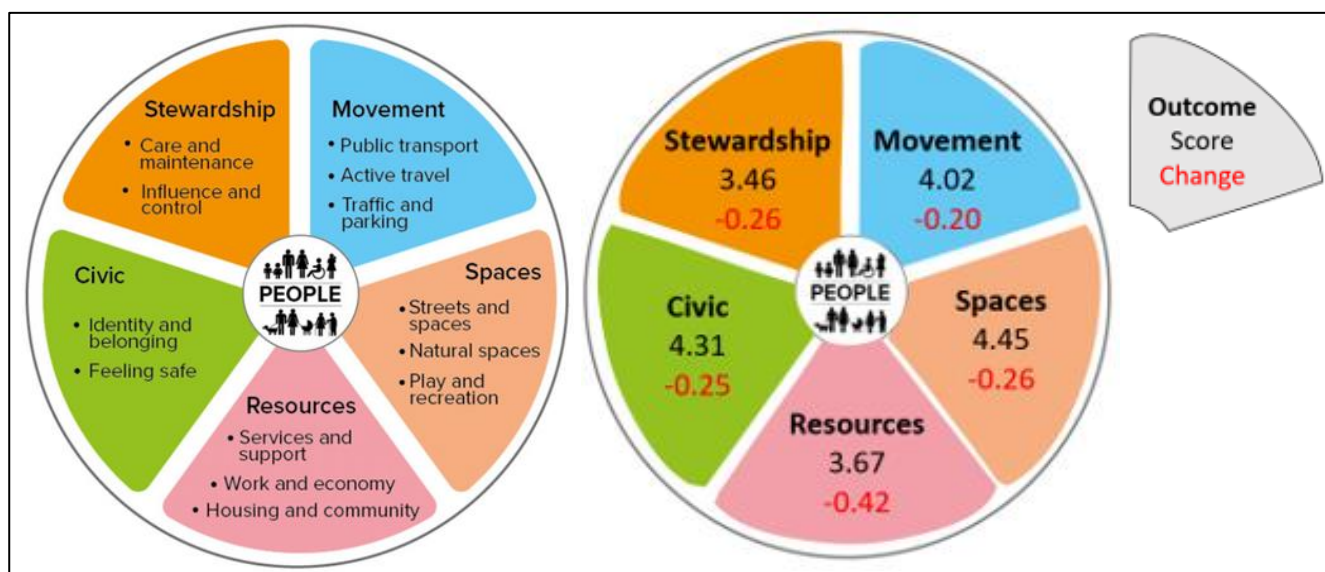


Figure 12.3 - Radar chart - How people perceive Fife as a Place, 2023 and change from previous years (2016, 2018, 2021, 2023)

## Place and Wellbeing outcomes

A recent evolution has been the development of the [Place and wellbeing outcomes](#) <sup>44</sup> framework, which identifies the key elements of what makes a place better (Figure 12.4).



**Figure 12.4 - Place & Wellbeing Outcomes: Fife outcome score 2023, change from 2021**

This allows us to consider a wide range of key elements consistently and to think about how they link together and what this may look like in Fife, and how we might improve it. Derived from the place standard tool these are:

1. [Movement](#) – active travel; public transport; traffic and parking
2. [Spaces](#) – streets and spaces; natural spaces; play and recreation
3. [Resources](#) – services and support; work and economy; housing and community
4. [Civic](#) – identity and belonging; feeling safe
5. [Stewardship](#) – care and maintenance; influence and control

Results from the Our Place 2023 survey show that Spaces are ranked the highest (least in need of improvement) and Stewardship the lowest (most in need of improvement).

**Table 12.5 – Place and wellbeing outcome scores for Fife and change from 2021**

Outcome	Movement	Space	Resources	Civic	Stewardship
Fife	4.02	4.45	3.67	4.31	3.46
change	-0.20	-0.26	-0.42	-0.25	-0.26

However, all outcomes have decreased in the last two years with Resources showing the biggest drop (-0.42) indicating that - together with Stewardship - the areas in this outcome would benefit most from a focus for collaborative effort.

<sup>44</sup> [Place and wellbeing outcomes](#)

Table 12.6 shows the Place and Wellbeing outcome scores for the seven local committee areas of Fife, along with the change in score from the 2021 survey.

**Table 12.6 – Place and wellbeing outcome scores by Area and Fife**

Area Committee	Outcome				
	Movement	Space	Resources	Civic	Stewardship
Cowdenbeath	3.93	4.18	3.13	3.93	2.94
	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>-0.78</b>	<b>-0.53</b>	<b>-0.49</b>
Dunfermline	4.37	4.61	3.82	4.51	3.72
	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>-0.32</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>-0.02</b>
Glenrothes	4.28	4.34	3.81	4.23	3.48
	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	<b>-0.17</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.09</b>
Kirkcaldy	3.99	4.40	3.69	4.05	3.23
	<b>-0.18</b>	<b>-0.22</b>	<b>-0.52</b>	<b>-0.54</b>	<b>-0.48</b>
Levenmouth	3.71	3.99	3.36	3.50	3.08
	<b>-0.46</b>	<b>-0.48</b>	<b>-0.39</b>	<b>-0.43</b>	<b>-0.36</b>
North East Fife	3.98	4.81	3.78	4.77	3.77
	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>-0.37</b>	<b>-0.55</b>	<b>-0.63</b>	<b>-0.47</b>
South West Fife	4.00	4.48	3.79	4.52	3.51
	<b>-0.53</b>	<b>-0.65</b>	<b>-0.63</b>	<b>-0.31</b>	<b>-0.62</b>
Fife	4.02	4.45	3.67	4.31	3.46
	<b>-0.20</b>	<b>-0.26</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>-0.25</b>	<b>-0.26</b>

The table cells are shaded to show where outcomes are scoring highest (deeper / darker green) through to lowest (deeper / darker red). The change in score since 2021 is shown in **red bold** for a decrease in score and **black bold** where an increase is seen.

Space and Civic outcomes score relatively well across all Areas. Scores range from 4.81 for Space in North East Fife to 2.94 for Stewardship in Cowdenbeath area.

Change is predominantly negative, pointing to a growing need for improvement across aspects of Place for areas, with the exception of Dunfermline and Glenrothes, where marginal improvements are seen for some outcomes.

Looking at the outcomes across the Areas of Fife, there is broad agreement in how they rank. Resources and stewardship show greatest need for improvement and are consistently ranked 4th or 5<sup>th</sup> in all areas.

Space is the outcome in least need of improvement for all areas except South West Fife, where the Civic outcome is in the top spot. The second and third ranking outcomes then vary between areas with Movement and Civic outcomes alternating position across the areas.

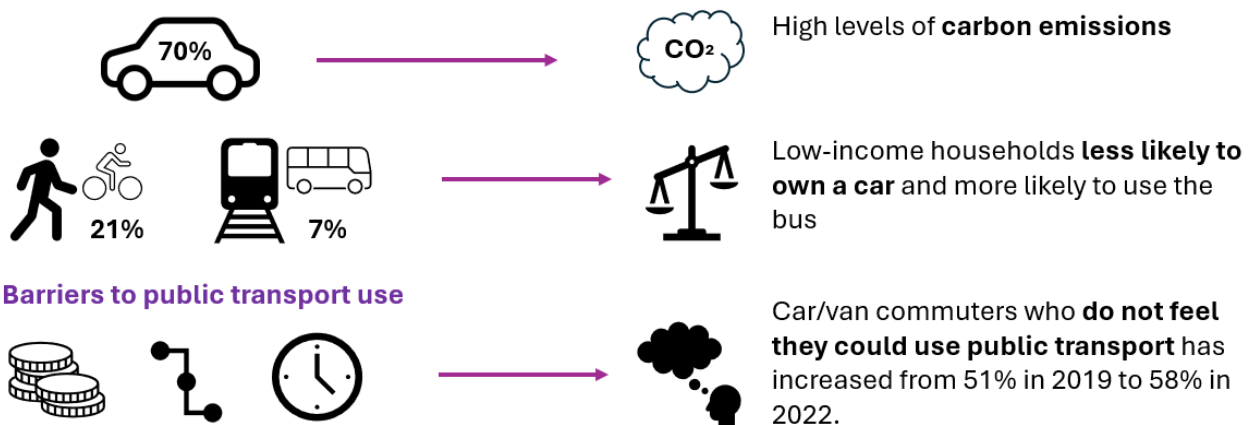


# 13. Connectivity

Limited connectivity, encompassing physical, digital, and social aspects, reduces choice and influence over desired activities and outcomes. It can lead to decreased social connectivity, with research suggesting that loneliness and social isolation causes negative health outcomes.<sup>45</sup>

Despite national efforts to encourage alternative transport, including public transport and active travel, driving remains the main form of transport in Fife, as shown in Figure 13.1. Substantial variation in physical connectivity is still apparent, with urban centres, towns and Forth Bridgehead well served by public transport, and areas such as West Fife villages and North East Fife being poorly served.<sup>46</sup> There is unequal access to car ownership and public transport in Fife, with barriers to public transport including cost, connections and reliability. Fife Council has adopted the sustainable travel hierarchy, acknowledging the importance of car travel, however prioritising sustainable travel including active travel and public transport.

## All Journeys in Fife in 2022



**Figure 13.1 – All Journeys in Fife in 2022 (Scottish Household Survey, Transport Scotland & Fife Council, Our Place Survey 2023)**

Disparity in active travel accessibility is evident between urban and rural areas at a Scottish, and at a Fife level as shown in figure 13.2, when examined across combined Scottish Living Locally Data Portal (SLLDP) domains.<sup>47</sup>

Increased accessibility is detailed within the most deprived areas, as shown in figure 13.3, when a comparison is made between the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile 1 (most deprived) and quintile 5 (least deprived). Although unhealthy retailers such as fast food restaurants, pubs and bars were removed from the eating establishment domain analysis, these areas are also more likely to have increased density of these outlets that can adversely impact health, and socio-economic barriers to using facilities/services.

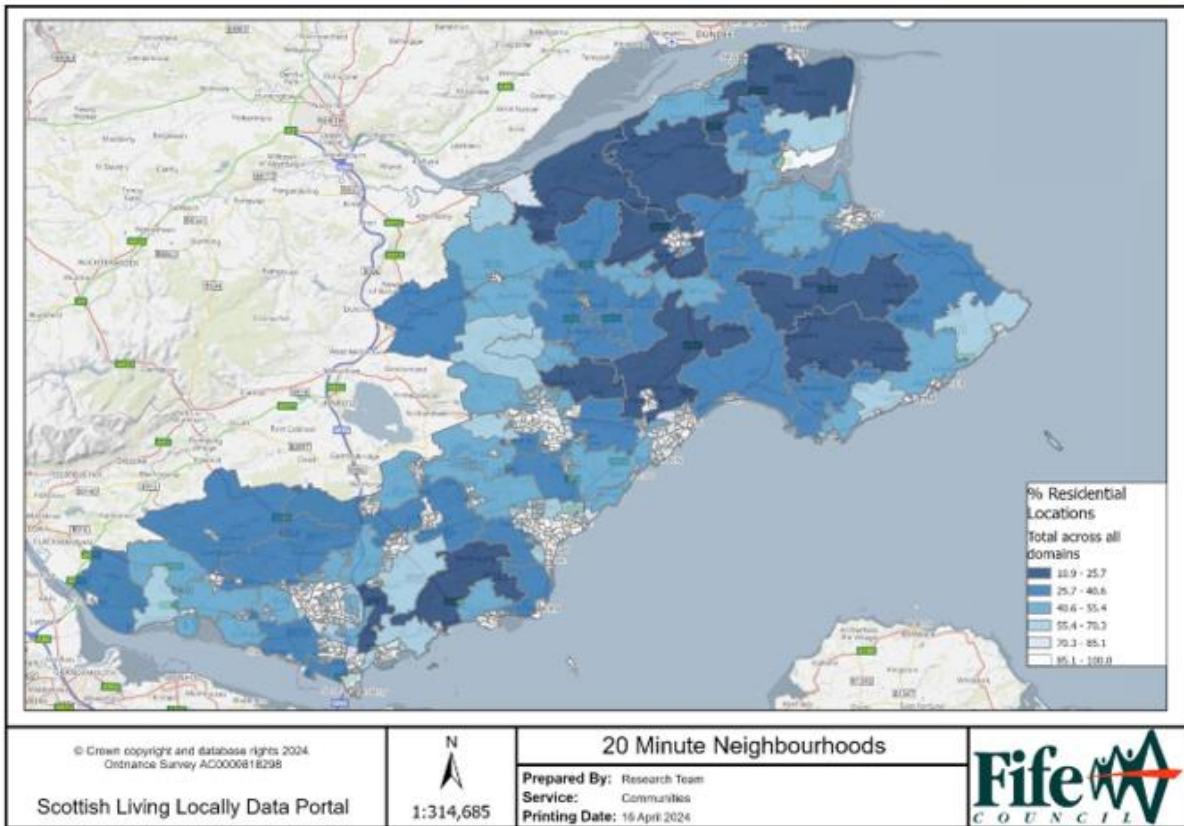
Urban and town centres detail increased general accessibility with areas on the periphery and rural areas experience poorer access. Infrastructure can also be considered a barrier to active travel, with roads and railway cutting centres off from the wider area. Increasing

<sup>45</sup> Foster et al. (2023). Social connection and mortality in UK Biobank: a prospective cohort analysis, BMC Medicine, 21, 1-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-023-03055-7> (Accessed 20th December 2023).

<sup>46</sup> [Local Transport Strategy for Fife 2023-2033](#) (Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024).

<sup>47</sup> The [Scottish Living Locally Data Portal \(SLLDP\)](#) is an interactive online map showing locations in Scotland whether they have access (15 minute, 20 minute and 30 minute) to 12 living locally domains.

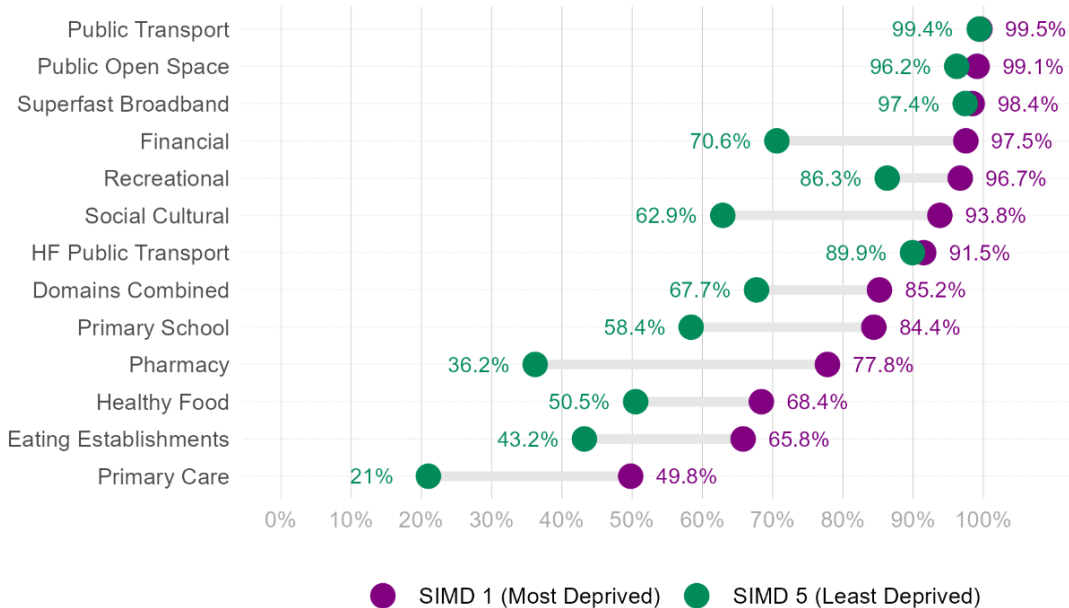
connectivity within and between accessible small towns would enhance accessibility, promote active travel and reduce carbon emissions.



**Figure 13.2 - 20 Minute Neighbourhoods (Scottish Living Locally Data Portal) - Percentage of residential locations across all domains**

### Scottish Living Locally Data Portal

20-minute neighbourhoods by data portal domain: deprivation comparison



**Figure 13.3 - 20 Minute Neighbourhoods (Scottish Living Locally Data Portal) – Comparison of most and least deprived areas across domains and combined**

Fife has adopted a living locally context, following the same ambition as 20 minute neighbourhoods, but better reflecting the challenges and realities of living in rural areas<sup>48</sup>. Embedding spatial network analysis into place design provides insight and understanding of how our communities/places are being supported, including those areas experiencing connectivity issues and are at an increased risk of transport poverty.

While Fife has good fixed broadband availability (96.5% of residential premises in Fife in 2022 having superfast broadband)<sup>49</sup>, issues of unequal access including data and device poverty, digital exclusion, and poor digital literacy persist. These issues are particularly prevalent among older and low-income populations. Housing tenure is also a factor in internet access with homeowners having increased access compared to those living in social housing. In 2022, 22% of employed people (16+) in Fife reported working from home, compared to 14% in 2019. Rural areas typically have more to gain from improved connectivity compared to urban areas. As more services move online, the requirement for consistent, reliable digital connectivity increases, as does the risk of people becoming digitally excluded due to the cost of living crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of social connectivity and how it impacts on physical and mental health. In 2022, 23% of adults in Scotland reported feelings of loneliness in the last week, up from 21% in 2018.<sup>50</sup> People within the most deprived areas and disabled people are twice as likely to report loneliness. The highest levels of loneliness are in those aged 75 or older (29%) followed by those aged 16-24 years (24%).

Although the benefits of social connectivity are apparent, understanding what organisations and communities can do to support social relationships and connectivity is more complex. Research carried out by What Works Wellbeing in 2018 and 2023<sup>51</sup> reviewed intervention types and influence on outcomes linked to social connectivity and wellbeing. This highlighted that place interventions can have both a positive and negative impact on social connectivity outcomes. Community hubs and community development have a strong positive impact on outcomes, whereas other interventions had positive outcomes, but negatively impacted those they excluded. As services work together under the no wrong door approach (community assistance hubs) this will influence physical, digital and social connectivity as digital literacy and infrastructure will become increasingly important.

Areas with poor physical connectivity also highlight worsening social connectivity. Actions to improve physical connectivity in Fife include new transport links, for example Levenmouth railway and transport links, and concession schemes. Digital support initiatives are also in place to mitigate digital exclusion. The challenges of diverse urban and rural areas, socio-economic barriers, and the demand for greater digital inclusion remain.

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<sup>48</sup> Fife Council [Annex-7-Local-Living-and-20-Minute-Neighbourhoods-Storymap-v2.pdf \(fife.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed 3 March 2024)

<sup>49</sup> [Connected Nations 2022: data downloads - Ofcom](#) (Accessed 12 January 2024).

<sup>50</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2022: Key Findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) (Accessed 3 April 2024).

<sup>51</sup> [WWW Review - Places Spaces \(whatworkswellbeing.org\)](#) (Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024).

## 14. Spatial issues

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Fife is the 3rd largest of 32 local authorities by population, and the 13th largest by geographic size, covering 1,325 square kilometres of land. Bounded by the River Tay to the north, and River Forth to the south, Fife's coastline extends for around 185 kilometres.

Fife has a decentralised structure based around 7 Area Committees, which are the same as Health and Social Care Localities. Each Area is built up from a local grouping of Fife's 22 multi-member Wards, within which are settlements (or towns).

While Fife has a mixture of urban and rural settlements, two-thirds of people tend to live in urban areas, mainly in or near to its three largest urban centres, City of Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes, with the remaining people living in smaller towns or villages. Central and south Fife are characterised by a mainly urban and industrial landscape, while the south west of Fife and most of the east of Fife, are more rural in nature.

Key challenges identified for delivering local living in Fife include centralisation of key services, infrequent, slow and expensive public transport, size of settlements and distance between them in some very rural areas, and lack of good quality, safe and direct active travel links between key destinations.

Actions put forward for improving connectivity within the Area Committees is evidenced within the Local Development Evidence report, with accessibility considerations stipulated within planning requirements.

### Local Development Plan

A new Local Development Plan (LDP) will be prepared to replace the current FIFEplan<sup>52</sup> (adopted in 2017). The LDP is the spatial expression of the Plan for Fife<sup>53</sup>, representing both the spatial and land use aspects of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

The submission of the Evidence Report<sup>54</sup> in March 2024, marks the first stage of this task, the purpose of which is to support the quality and effectiveness of the local development plan. It sets out the information on which the new plan will be founded and what the Council needs to plan for.

The next stage is to engage stakeholders, including community groups, in a call for sites to be assessed for inclusion on the development plan. The Proposed Plan will set out where development could go, how places could change and the policies to support that change. Consultation on the proposed plan will be undertaken during 2025/26. The Plan is expected to be adopted in 2027/28.

The following table highlights some of the similarities and differences across the 7 area committees for ten broad topics based on the Fife Local Development Plan Evidence Report published to Fife Council on 21st March 2024.

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<sup>52</sup> [Adopted FIFEplan](#)

<sup>53</sup> [FIFEplan interactive mapping](#)

<sup>54</sup> [fife.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/564175/01-The-Evidence-Report-with-images-Council-version.pdf](https://fife.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/564175/01-The-Evidence-Report-with-images-Council-version.pdf)

**Table 14.1 - Similarities and differences across the 7 Area Committees for ten broad topics based on Fife Local Development Plan #2 Evidence Pack (March 2024)**

Theme Category	Topics	Comments
Past development	Core and connectivity	Connections and access to local services within town centres are generally good but become less so on the outskirts of towns and in villages due to rurality, distances, poor layouts or physical barriers.
The need to change due to climate and biodiversity emergencies	Flooding and erosion	All areas have had experienced repeated incidents of flooding with coastal erosion in South West Fife, Kirkcaldy, Levenmouth and North East Fife areas.
	Water quality	Ground and surface water is of mixed quality in all areas with legacy pollution from mining.
	Green networks	All areas are part of the Central Scotland Green Network and have identified potential Heat Network Zones. All areas have some form of special landscape areas including nationally important peatlands.
Infrastructure issues to be addressed	Healthcare	All areas require additional NHS Fife primary care facilities.
	Greenspace	Access to and provision of quality green space is mixed, but below average in Cowdenbeath and Levenmouth.
	Public transport and access to employment	Public transport is mostly good but is less so on the outskirts of towns and in rural areas. Public transport access to employment varies but is best in the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy areas and less so in the Levenmouth area.
How the economy is performing and how resilient it is	Deprivation	The highest levels of deprivation are in the Cowdenbeath and Levenmouth areas and the lowest levels are in the North East Fife and South West Fife areas.
	Travel to work	Most travel to work is within areas except for locations close to the Forth Bridgehead and Tay Bridgehead which have significant numbers of people traveling to Edinburgh and Dundee.
	Town centres	Most town centres are experiencing similar challenges around vacant premises and footfall but premise occupancy rates in Glenrothes and the South West Fife area are generally good.

**Source: Fife Local Development Plan 2, Evidence Report, March 2024 (as published to Fife Council on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024)**




# 15. Environment

Fife is well known for its historic attractions and scenic landscapes, attracting increased levels of visitors and strengthening the region's economy. The diverse landscape, from low lying arable farmland, upland pasture and moorland, hills and the coastline, is a very important asset with Fife's beaches winning the highest number of beach awards in Scotland in 2023.

Addressing the impact of climate change is a major challenge, and a key strategic risk for Fife, that cuts across many outcomes. Monitoring and incorporating solutions to improve Fife's environment, including climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation is essential to maintain our places, assets, and quality of life.

Fife's climate change mirrors the Scottish picture, with increases in flood risk, coastal change, damage to buildings and infrastructure and prevalence of pests/diseases in the natural environment. The urgent need for reduced carbon emissions, and greater community resilience to climate change, is emphasised in Fife Council's key strategies. Figure 15.1 provides an overview of the key climate change hazards and risks identified in 2020 in Fife.<sup>55</sup>

**Table 15.1 – Climate change hazards in Fife**

Hazard	Type	Threat / Risk
 Flooding	River Coastal Surface Sewer	Infrastructure Housing Business Sites
 Storms/high temperatures	Wind storms Electrical storms Storm surges High temperatures Wildfire	Infrastructure: Transport ICT Energy Biodiversity
 Water Scarcity	Rural water supplies Private water supplies	Reliant on private boreholes Increase biodiversity loss

Supporting communities to make long term changes and building resilience is key to achieving the vision for climate Fife, with the six action programme themes outlined including buildings, low carbon energy, zero waste, transport and travel, nature and land, and protecting and supporting our communities.<sup>56</sup>

Planning for rising sea levels, increased flooding events and water scarcity caused by climate change is essential in ensuring risk to people, place and property is appropriately managed. Those who are at the highest risk from climate change hazards are often those that are least able to adapt. Specific locations, and factors such as health conditions, poverty and age, influence communities' resilience, resulting in unequal impact to climate change.

<sup>55</sup> [Climate Change 2022-23 \(fife.gov.uk\)](https://www.fife.gov.uk) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>56</sup> [Climate Fife 2024 Strategy and Action Plan](#) (Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024)

## Carbon Emissions

Fife continues to be road dominated, impacting carbon emissions, with car the prominent travel mode. There has been an overall reduction in carbon dioxide (kt CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions for all sectors in Fife (37%), excluding agriculture from 2005 – 2021, with the transport sector being a significant emissions risk, following domestic, due to levels reducing at a lower rate.<sup>57</sup> Although the agriculture sector accounts for 3.7% of carbon emissions in Fife within the same period, levels in 2021 are significantly higher than previous years due to the increase in agriculture gas. The Scottish picture also reflects the increase in agriculture emissions in 2021.

Although air quality is high in most parts of Fife there are a few historical areas of concern, however these areas show continuing improvement.<sup>58</sup> Public engagement/education, including the anti-idling campaign and clean air day, as well as Fife's modal shift to active travel and public transport continue to inform and target congestion and pollution in Fife. Although there has been an increase in electric vehicle owners in Scotland in 2022, cost of purchase was the consistent reason for not owning a vehicle, rising from 36% of responses in 2019 to 52% in 2022, demonstrating unequal access to climate mitigation measures.

To significantly reduce carbon emissions, we must change energy systems and how we heat and power our homes and businesses. Fuels from the heat sector made up half of Scotland's energy consumption (50.6%) in 2021 and accounted for 19.7% of greenhouse gas emissions (mt CO<sub>2</sub>e)<sup>59</sup>. 57% of renewable electricity generation in Fife in 2022 was from plant biomass, followed by onshore wind (29%), anaerobic digestion (7%) and solar (5%). The rise in number of renewable electricity installations from 2020 to 2022 is due to a 35% increase in solar installations.<sup>60</sup> Actions should only be implemented that support communities' access to affordable clean heating and transportation, where there is no detrimental impact. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES)<sup>61</sup> provides a local tailored approach for improving energy efficiency, including heat network opportunities, and changing to low carbon heating in buildings, in a way that financially benefits the people of Fife. Making buildings greener, easier to heat and more environmentally friendly will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, meeting national targets, however this must not negatively impact households with existing cost pressures, with increased fuel poverty and costs for businesses.

## Unequal Access to Open Space

Strategies continue to address the unequal access to open space and biodiversity, and the health and wellbeing benefits these areas provide. Alongside the significant risks linked to the ever-changing climate and unseasonable weather events, other risks include the availability of land for differing purposes including affordable housing, renewables, forest regeneration and wider biodiversity projects. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) outlines Scotland's goal of moving from the current trend of declining biodiversity, to halting biodiversity loss by 2030 and reversing the trend to increasing biodiversity by 2045<sup>62</sup>. Significant biodiversity loss has occurred in Fife due to urbanisation, agriculture, and

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<sup>57</sup> [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions national statistics, 2005 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2021) (Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>58</sup> Fife Air Quality Annual Progress Report. Available at: [Ricardo report template \(fife.gov.uk\)](https://www.fife.gov.uk/ricardo-report-template) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>59</sup> [Scottish Energy Statistics Hub \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io/scottish-energy-statistics/) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024)

<sup>60</sup> Regional Renewable Statistics. [Regional Renewable Statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/regional-renewable-statistics) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>61</sup> [Local heat & energy efficiency strategy \(LHEES\) and delivery plan | Fife Council](https://www.fife.gov.uk/local-heat-and-energy-efficiency-strategy-lhees-and-delivery-plan/) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>62</sup> [Framework for 30 by 30 in Scotland - Draft | NatureScot](https://www.naturescot.gov.uk/framework-for-30-by-30-in-scotland-draft/) (Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

industry.<sup>63</sup> Increasing biodiversity supports significant health benefits by removing carbon dioxide emissions by healthy ecosystems, cleaner air, water purification, supporting sustainable food production and flood prevention.

Green and blue spaces combat excessive heat from rising temperatures from a mitigation and adaptation perspective and improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Unequal access to these spaces in Fife is being addressed by strategies, including the Play Space strategy<sup>64</sup>, NHS Greenspace Strategy<sup>65</sup>, as well as biodiversity metrics built into the Open Space assessment criteria, and opportunities to restore biodiversity and access to these areas across Fife within the Green and Blue Network Audit<sup>66 67</sup>. The development of green networks and provision of cycleways and paths will support active travel in providing alternatives to car use and contribute to reducing car emissions. The renewal of Fife's greenspace audit and strategy will provide a local level assessment of greenspaces including quantity, quality and accessibility.

## Food and Waste

Agriculture is a crucial driver of climate change, therefore tackling what we eat and how we produce food will have a significant impact on the environment due to the vast land use involved.<sup>68</sup> Although both urban and rural areas show pockets of increased priority, Mid Fife is highlighted, with a higher concentration of highest priority datazones that have a lack of accessibility to cheap, healthy and sustainable sources of food.<sup>69</sup> Reduced transport options in rural areas exacerbates the problem, with a dependence on private transport for shopping, lowering access to fresh produce outlets. Local food has been brought into Fife's public buildings including schools, hospitals and learning institutions, working towards establishing sustainable food chains and ensuring wealth generated by the local food economy stays in Fife. With the number of emergency food provision facilities rising, alongside increased cost of living, understanding how to distribute surplus food, support community growing initiatives and facilitate healthy eating and skills development is paramount.

There has been a slight increase in Fife's recycling rates between 2021 and 2022 from 43.6% to 45.7%, remaining above the Scottish average (43.3%).<sup>70</sup> COVID-19 has had an impact on amount of waste produced, with an increase from home working and home improvements, and a decrease for 2022 following the easing of restrictions. 9.4% of household waste was diverted from landfill in 2022. Although the amount of household waste generated in Scotland in 2022 represents the lowest figure on record, Fife Council will need to introduce new waste management infrastructure to meet Scottish Government objectives.

The vision of Fife outlined by Climate Action includes a Fife with energy efficient homes, neighbourhoods that are greener and more resilient to flooding, fewer journeys made by car and less food waste. To achieve this everyone, from households, communities, and businesses must be supported to make achievable change by focussing on collaborative place-based approaches.

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<sup>63</sup> Fife Local Biodiversity Action Plan. 2013 – 2018 [FifeLBAP 4thEd.pdf](#) (Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>64</sup> [DRAFT Play Park Strategy 2018 - 2028 \(fife.gov.uk\)](#) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>65</sup> NHS Fife 2030 Greenspace Strategy, [NHS Fife Greenspace strategy - Draft 2 May 23](#) (Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>66</sup> [Green and Blue Networks in Fife Audit - 2023 \(arcgis.com\)](#) (Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>67</sup> Fife Council: [Green and Blue Networks Reports | Fife Council](#) (Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>68</sup> [Food4Fife strategy and action plan consultation draft-online.pdf](#) (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>69</sup> [CDRC Mapmaker: Priority Places for Food Index \(Version 2\) \(Overall decile\)](#) (Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024)

<sup>70</sup> [scottish-household-waste-generated-and-managed-commentary.pdf \(sepa.org.uk\)](#) (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024).



# Performance

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## 16. Plan for Fife Ambitions

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The Annual Review of Plan for Fife Priorities and Ambitions 2023<sup>71</sup> reflected the ongoing and not unexpected challenges that Fife continues to face in recovering from the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

Through a continued focus on recovery and renewal priorities, Delivery Boards have shown good progress. There has been improved use of data and evidence to target poverty interventions and maximise household incomes.

Partners are flexing their power as anchor organisations to re-wire systems and processes to deliver Community Wealth Building: increasing local procurement, increasing recruitment for those facing most barriers, and capturing greater community benefits. In terms of local economic recovery, as well as post-pandemic growth in tourism, external funding has been secured to support businesses, create jobs and opportunities in mid-Fife.

The delivery of community climate projects continues to expand, biodiversity enhancement activity underway with grants available to support transition to net zero for businesses in Fife. Good progress is also being made in reducing Fife's carbon footprint.

Across the wider ambitions, while good progress is being made in literacy and numeracy, and in closing the attainment gap, the gap remains between most and least deprived communities. More young people are now going into positive destinations on leaving school. Fewer people are being paid less than the living wage.

Tourism is a success story in terms of economic recovery. Town centres continue to face ongoing challenges. Lower business survival rates reflect the increased costs of doing business arising from a mix of factors (including Brexit, the pandemic and rising energy costs). Sports facilities, culture and leisure are taking time to recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Mid-Fife continues to be an area of strategic concern with persistently lower employment and higher unemployment rate relative to other areas of Fife. Poverty levels remain stubbornly high. Cost of living pressures have increased demand for community food, fuel and crisis support, working against the desire to move to more preventative approaches to tackling poverty before people end up in crisis.

Difficult economic circumstances are reflected in increased crime in some communities. Challenges remain around housing and homelessness with temporary accommodation limited and under pressure. Longer term health impacts on local communities continue to be an area of concern.

Despite the challenging social and economic context continuing to hamper improvement efforts, maintaining focus on the recovery and renewal priorities is supporting partners to work collaboratively to make a step change in the areas which will make the biggest difference to achievement of the long-term ambitions set out in the Plan for Fife 2017-2027.

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<sup>71</sup> [Plan for Fife Annual Review of Priorities and Ambitions 2023](#)










## 17. State of Fife

The State of Fife indicators are designed as a high level monitor of whether the Plan for Fife process is having the desired strategic impact it aims to achieve.

Nine indicators are being tracked based on the following criteria: strategic importance, availability of data, availability of benchmarking and availability of trend information (forwards and backwards). The indicators are intended to provoke discussion on whether we are doing the right things, approaching them in the right way and achieving the right level of impact.

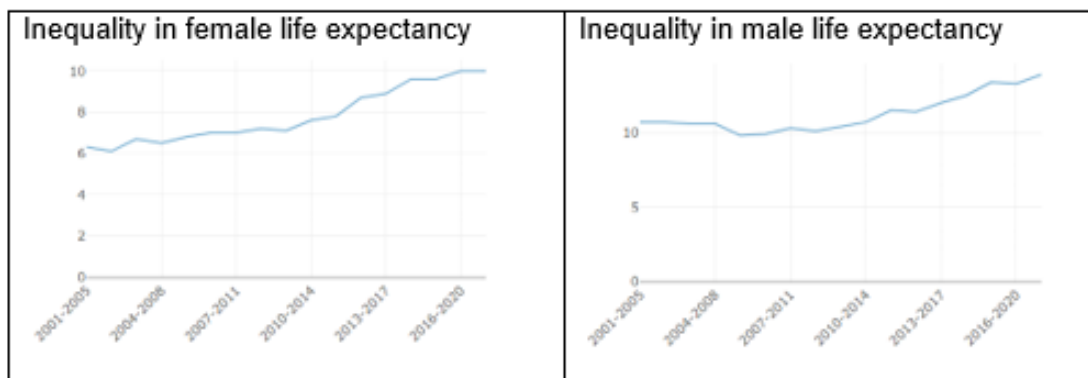
High level monitoring of State of Fife indicators shows Plan for Fife delivery is not having the intended impact. Latest data, trends and the gap between most and least deprived areas, reveal a worsening picture for almost all outcomes. There are significant inequalities in outcomes between most and least deprived communities. The gap is widening over time in relation to key outcomes such as life expectancy and school attainment.

**Table 17.1 – Assessment of progress with State of Fife Indicators for most and least deprived areas, Fife and Scotland**

			Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	Scotland
1	Life expectancy in years	Females	76.9	85.1	80.9		80.7
		Males	71.5	82.4	76.6		76.5
2	Healthy life expectancy in years	Females	not available		54.5		61.1
		Males	not available		58.6		60.4
3	Early child development concerns		27.1%	15.2%	19.1%		17.9%
4	School attainment (One or more Higher at S5)		27.4%	70.1%	47.8%		55.3%
5	Employment rate		not available		75.2%		74.9%
6	Income deprivation		26.4%	2.2%	11.9%	N/A	12.1%
7	Influence over decisions		18%	19%	24%	N/A	18%
8	Mental health (prescriptions for anxiety and depression)		27.1%	15.3%	21.3%		20.1%
9	Mental wellbeing (WEMWBS)		46.5	51.2	48.8		48.9

Life expectancy continues to stall, indicating a need to monitor trends and inequalities in mortality and a more general need to improve health and its determinants.

In Fife, 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).



**Figure 17.2 – Inequality gap (slope index) in female and male life expectancy in Fife (most and least deprived quintiles, 2005-2021) (ScotPHO)**

While healthy life expectancy overall has been reducing, Fife is reducing at a sharper rate than Scotland, particularly for females.

The proportion of children in Fife with any developmental concern recorded at the 27-30 month review increased to 19.1% for 2021/22 compared to 14.6% for 2020/21. This is higher than the Scottish average for 2021/22 (17.9%) but consistent with national trends which report developmental concerns increasing across all domains and all review points.

Fife’s school attainment score for those seeking access routes through higher education, as a means to improving the inclusion of post school opportunities, continues to track below the Scottish average. The inequality gap for attainment between most and least deprived areas is much higher in Fife (2.6 times), while for Scotland the gap is only twice the rate (38.1% vs 76.9%).

In most parts of Fife, employment rates in 2022-2023 were above the pre-pandemic 2019 levels. Fife’s overall employment rate was at 75%, higher than that of Scotland at 74.6%, and higher than 2019 at which time it was 73.2%.

While there has been no update to this indicator since SIMD 2020, Fife income deprivation tends to track the Scottish level.

In 2019, while Fife residents felt more able to influence decisions in their local area compared to Scotland, this was a reduction from previous years. Analysis by quintile shows that those living in quintiles 2,3 and 4 felt more able to influence decisions in their local area than those living in the most or least deprived areas of Fife.

The proportion of the population in receipt of prescriptions for anxiety and depression is significantly higher in Fife than Scotland. The rate in Fife’s most deprived areas is nearly twice that in its least deprived areas.

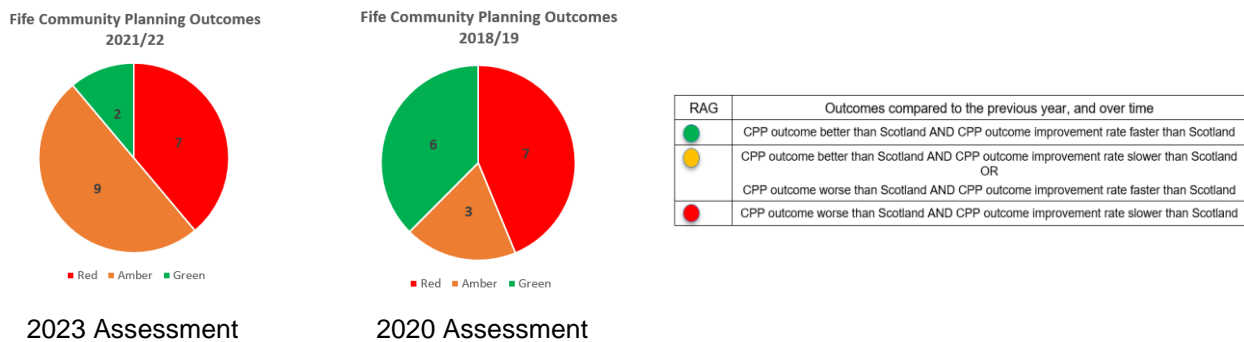
The latest data (2018-22) for the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) shows the lowest average WEMWBS score (48.8) in Fife recorded in the Scottish Health Survey and continues a downward trend for both Fife (49.4 in 2017-21 and 49.9 in 2016-19) and for most and least deprived areas of Fife.

# 18. Community Planning Outcomes

The Improvement Service provides an independent annual assessment of how Community Planning Partnerships are performing against a set of core measures on key life outcomes including early years, older people, safer/stronger communities, health and wellbeing, and engagement with local communities.

This provides a good high level reflection of the broad range of life outcomes that the Plan for Fife is looking to improve. It helps to assess if the lives of people in Fife are improving and provides a consistent basis for measuring outcomes and inequalities of outcome, from Fife, down to Area, and neighbourhood level (as per Local Strategic Assessments).

While the assessment is retrospective, based on a snapshot of data available for all Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Areas across Scotland as at 2021/22 the most recent data shows a relative worsening of Fife’s performance across key life outcomes compared to Scotland since the 2020 Strategic Assessment. More recent progress will be reflected in future annual updates.



**Figure 18.1 – Performance assessment for Fife CPP Area over time (Community Planning Outcomes Profiling tool (as at October 2023))**

Of the 18 indicators in the Community Planning Outcomes Framework, only 2 are assessed as Green, showing good progress relative to other areas of Scotland. This includes child healthy weight where more progress could be made. Caution is advised re assessment for fuel poverty, when this is based on projected rather than actual data, in context of higher energy costs.

9 indicators are assessed as Amber. This includes premature mortality, child poverty, healthy birthweight, unplanned hospital attendances, emergency admissions, crime rates, dwelling fires, and carbon emissions. Where progress against key life outcomes has been assessed as Amber, this is often against a generally improving trend, but Fife is not improving at the same rate as Scotland.

7 indicators are assessed as Red, including employment rate, median earnings, out of work benefits, business survival, fragility, and wellbeing reflecting the difficult social and economic context for recovery. Challenges remain around raising attainment and supporting positive destinations.

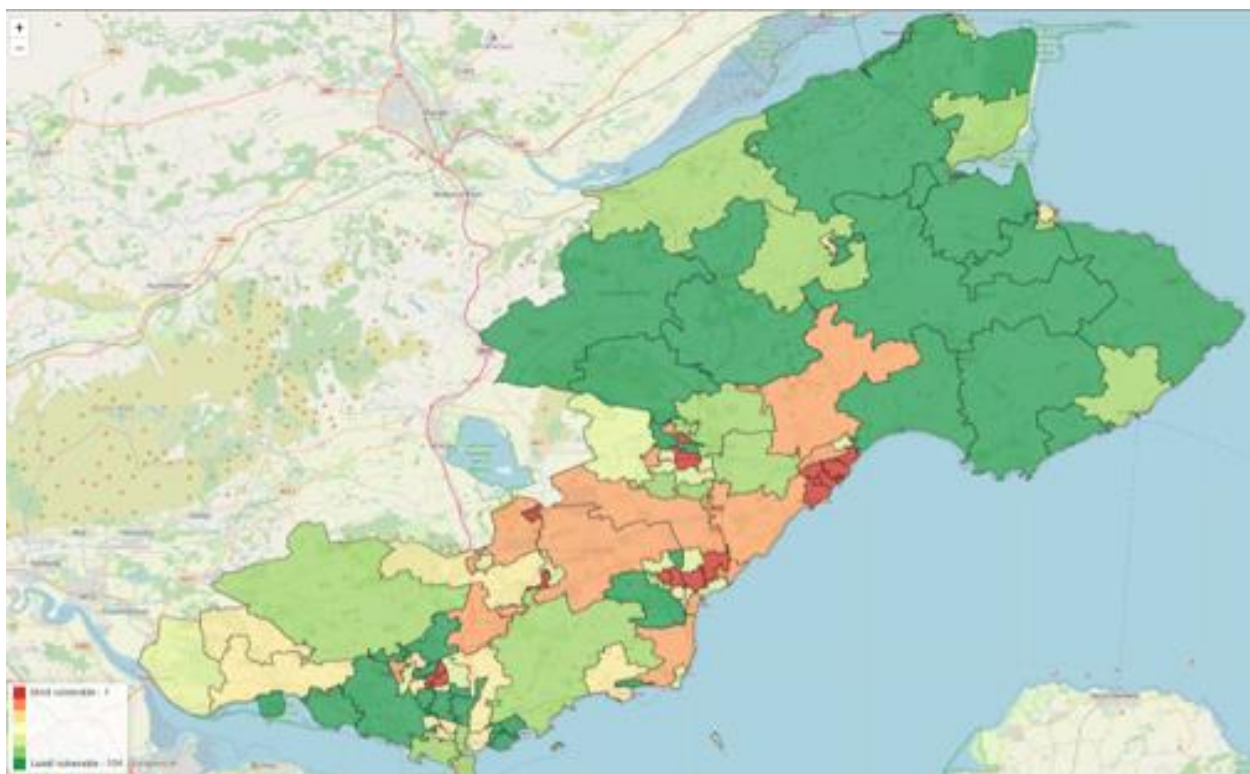
More information on the Community Planning Outcomes Profiling Tool, including indicator definitions, and locality information, is available at [Community Planning Outcomes Profile | Improvement Service](#).

## 19. Neighbourhood Improvement

The Community Empowerment Scotland Act 2015 requires Community Planning Partnerships to identify smaller areas within the local authority area which experience the poorest outcomes and prepare and publish locality plans to improve outcomes on agreed priorities for these communities (the outcomes prioritised for improvement may differ from those in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP)). We refer to these as Neighbourhood Plans, to differentiate them from locality plans for Health and Social Care.

Previous Local Strategic Assessments for each of the 7 Areas have highlighted those communities experiencing the poorest outcomes, drawing on evidence from the Community Planning Outcomes Profiling (CPOP) Tool. This has led to the development of Neighbourhood plans for some of these areas.

The map of community vulnerability below shows that poorer outcomes are firmly rooted in Place. Mid-Fife remains an area of strategic concern, with poorer outcomes for local communities, particularly in parts of Levenmouth, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath Areas.



**Figure 19.1 – Community map of neighbourhood vulnerability, Fife (CPOP, 2023)**

While 53% of local communities in Fife are performing better than expected (compared to similar communities elsewhere in Scotland), this varies between and within Areas. Communities at the bridgeheads, closer to the cities of Dunfermline, Edinburgh and Dundee, continue to have better outcomes: 62% in South and West Fife and City of Dunfermline, and 60% in North East Fife.

While 47% of communities in the Kirkcaldy Area and 45% in the Levenmouth Area are performing better than expected, there is variation within the Areas, with these areas have greater concentrations of the communities with 20% poorest outcomes for Fife. Only 20% of communities in the Cowdenbeath Area are performing better than expected.

The table below highlights the communities with the 20% poorest outcomes in Fife by Area. The top 5 areas of greatest need are in the Levenmouth and Kirkcaldy areas.

**Table 19.2 – Overview of how communities are performing by Area, including where local communities with 20% poorest outcomes are located (CPOP, 2023)**

Area	% of communities better than expected	Fife Rank	Communities with 20% poorest outcomes
South and West Fife	62%		n/a
City of Dunfermline	62%	8	Dunfermline Abbeyview North
		12	Dunfermline Touch and Woodmill
Cowdenbeath	20%	7	Ballingry
		15	Lochgelly West and Lumphinnans
		17	Cowdenbeath South
		18	Lochore and Crosshill
Kirkcaldy	47%	2	Kirkcaldy Gallatown and Sinclairtown
		4	Kirkcaldy Hayfield and Smeaton
		9	Kirkcaldy Templehall West
		10	Kirkcaldy Templehall East
		16	Dysart
Glenrothes	57%	6	Glenrothes Auchmuty
		13	Glenrothes Cadham and Pitcoudie
		19	Glenrothes Macedonia and Tanshall
Levenmouth	45%	1	Methil West
		3	Methil East
		5	Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge
		11	Leven East
		14	Methil Methilhill
		20	Wemyss
North East Fife	60%		n/a
Fife	53%		n/a

Exploration of these communities reveals common themes that underly poor outcomes. Child poverty is at a higher level than the Fife and Scottish averages, with the majority of identified communities seeing a year-on year increase. Emergency admissions per 100,000 is another key indicator, with most communities having a higher rate than Fife and Scotland, and this gap increasing. Poor health outcomes are also evidenced by premature mortality per 100,000, with rates above the Fife average and this divide increasing for many communities. Methil West has seen an increase for seven consecutive years, with the total increasing by 86% over this period.

This inequality gap linked to key life outcomes, and others such as attainment, crime rate, and participation of 16-19 year olds show that there is a greater gap in outcomes between most and least deprived areas of Fife, than for most and least deprived areas of Scotland.

**Table 19.3 – Inequality gap in key life outcomes for most and least deprived areas in both Fife and Scotland (Community Planning Outcomes Profiling Tool)**

	Fife		Scotland	
	Least deprived	Most deprived	Least deprived	Most deprived
Average Highest Attainment - 2020/21	6	4.9	6.1	5.1
Child Poverty (%) - 2021/22	7.5	37.4	6	37.3
Crime Rate, per 10,000 - 2021/22	414.7	2426.7	519.3	1882.5
Depopulation Index - 2021/22	97.3	101.2	94.2	100.3
Premature Mortality, per 100,000 - 2021/22	245.6	698.4	243.6	794.7
Emergency Admissions, per 100,000 - 2021/22	17227.2	29734.8	18309.4	32122
Out of Work Benefits (%) - 2021/22	4.2	33.1	4.3	31.4
Participation Rate - 2021/22	96.1	83.9	96.2	87.2



## 20. Views on Council services

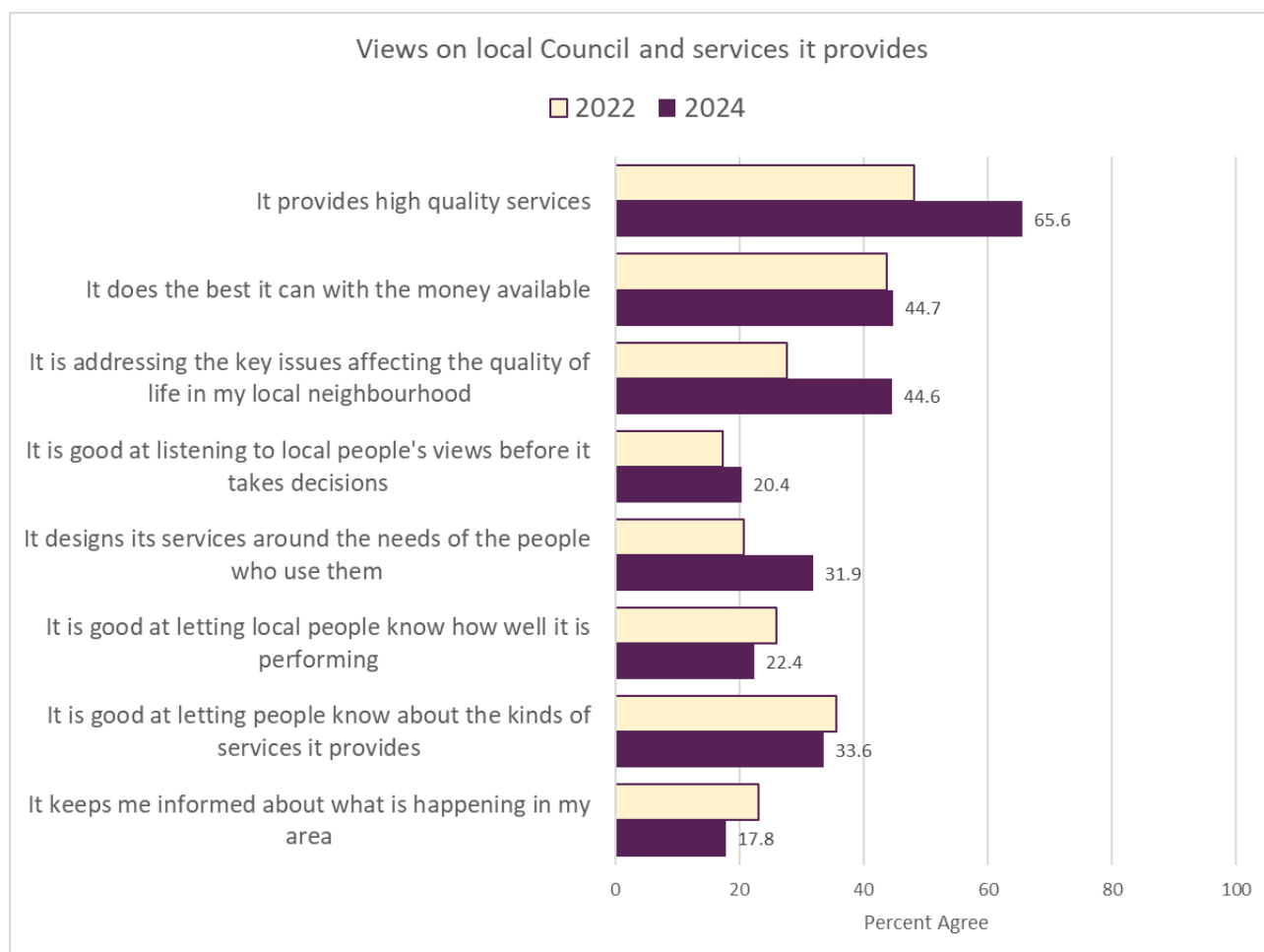
In February 2024, alongside the issues barometer, we asked people for their views on their local council and the services that it provides.

Around two thirds of people believe that Fife Council provides high quality services. This rating has improved to 65.6% from 48.1% in 2022.

Other ratings which are showing improvement since 2022 are that the Council is addressing the key issues that affect the quality of life in local neighbourhoods (44.6% from 27.7%) and it designs its services around the needs of the people who use them (31.9% up from 20.7%).

Just under half agree that the Council does the best it can with money available, and a third believe the Council is good at letting people know about the services that it provides. Both of these ratings are similar to what they were in 2022.

Results which show a slight reduction since 2022 are in relation to how good the council is at letting people know how it is performing (22.4%), listening to local people's views before it takes decisions (20.4%) and keeping people informed about what is happening in the local area (17.8%). This is consistent with findings on influence and sense of control from the Place survey.



**Figure 20.1 – Views on local Council and services it provides (Fife People's Panel, 2024 vs 2022)**

## 21. How Fife compares

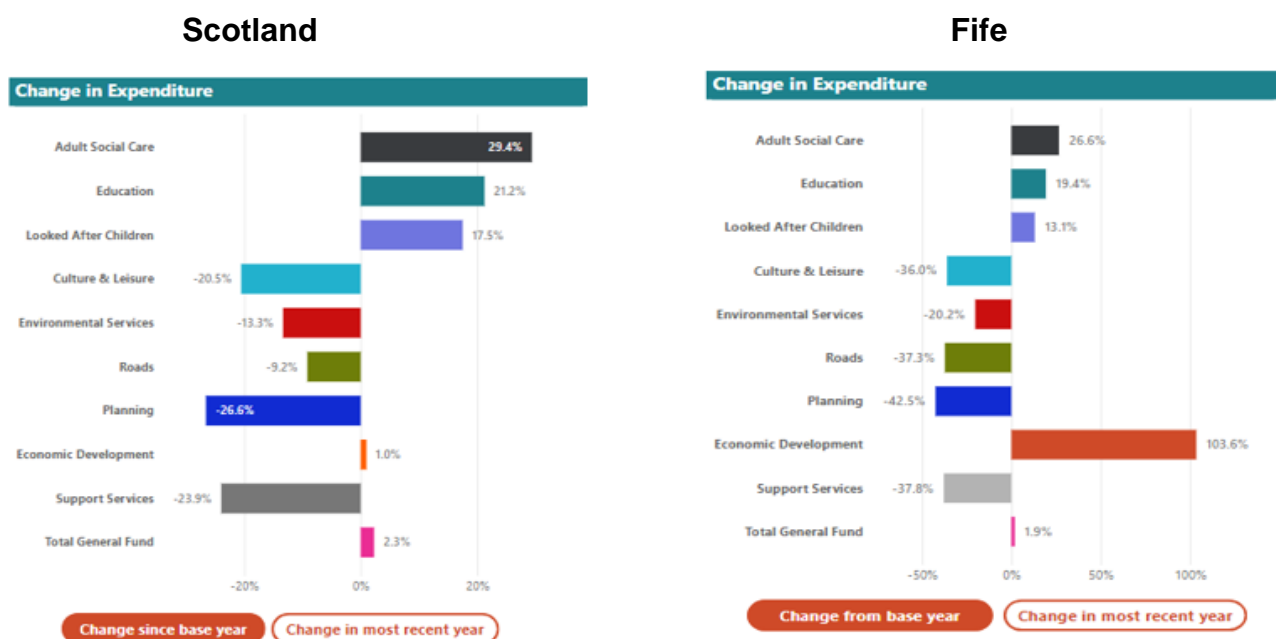
The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) brings together a wide range of information about how all Scottish councils perform in delivering services to local communities.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) brings together a wide range of information about how all Scottish councils perform in delivering services to local communities.

The national benchmarking overview report for 2022/23 highlights that councils are facing increasingly challenging decisions around service delivery due to deepening fiscal, workforce, and demand pressures. It finds that funding for councils is failing to keep pace with increasing demand for services, growing need, and costs pressures, while workforce recruitment and retention are growing issues across much of the workforce.

All councils are continuing to protect social care, education and looked after children however the degree of protection and investment choices vary. Reductions are in similar areas across the board although Fife has reduced some to a greater degree over the same period.

### Scotland vs Fife Change in Expenditure Trends

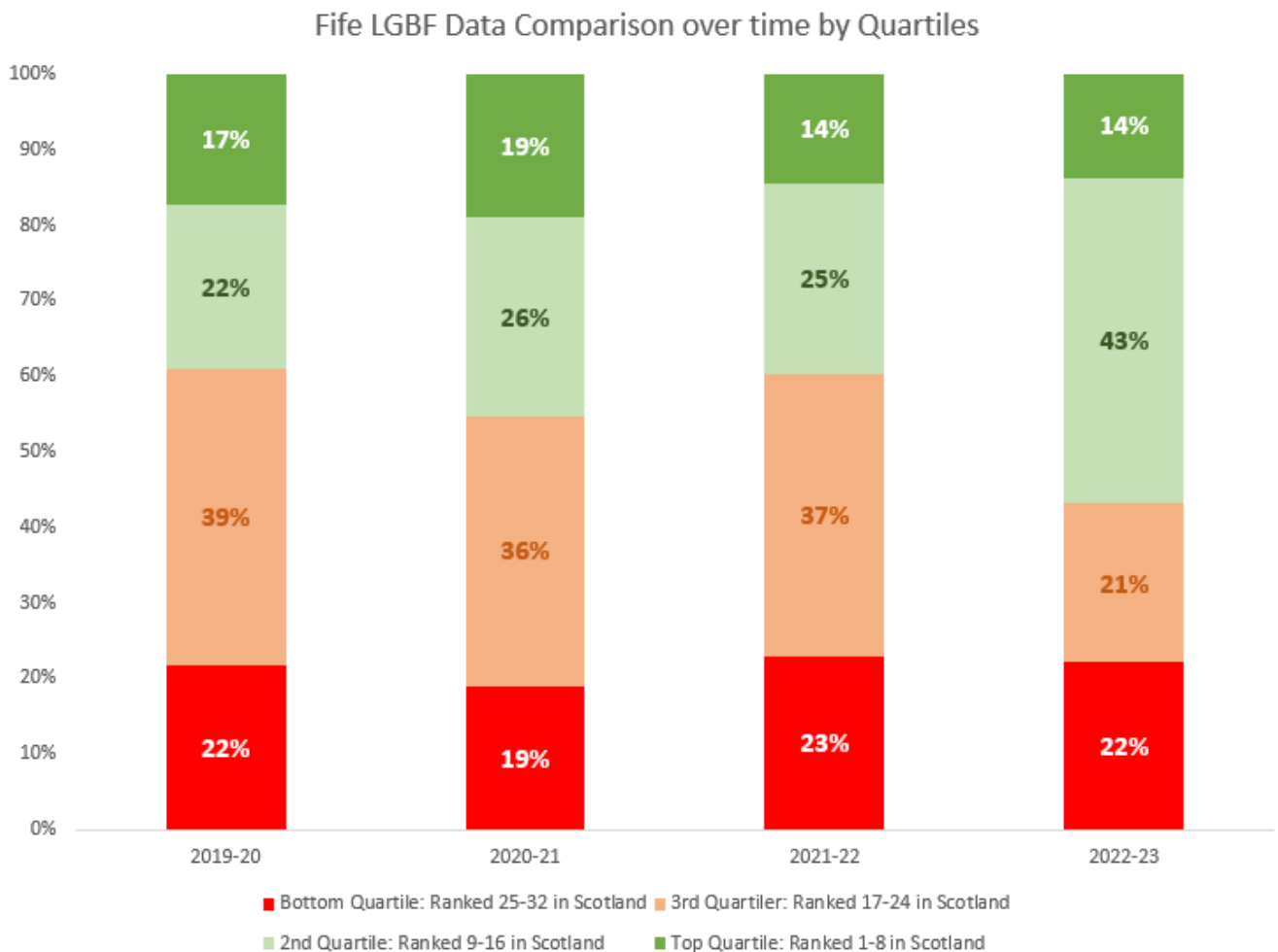


**Figure 21.1 – Change in expenditure trends, Scotland and Fife (Local Financial Returns, LGBF 2022/23)**

Note: the substantial increase in expenditure within Economic Development was not investment made by Fife Council directly but can be attributed to £73million of government funding to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. In terms of local economic recovery, as well as post-pandemic growth, this funding helped secure support to businesses, which ensured sustainability of jobs, particularly in Mid-Fife. This included increased business start ups from people who adapted or identified gaps in the market during the pandemic.

An overall comparison of LGBF performance across all 32 councils across Scotland shows year to year fluctuation in the number of indicators where Fife features in the top two quartiles. Caution is needed in interpreting performance relating to 2020/21.

The current position with LGBF data published for 2022/23 shows 57% of indicators in the top two quartiles, reflecting improved performance. Note, as at 1 May 2024 there remain 13 of 108 LGBF indicators for which data is still to be published for 2022/23 which may change the overall position.



**Figure 21.2 – LGBF data comparison across all 32 Councils by quartile (note analysis of LGBF data available as at May 2024)**

For each of the indicators within the benchmarking framework we have reviewed where Fife’s performance has improved or declined over time, and how it compares with Fife’s Family Group and Scotland overall.

While Fife has improved its performance over time on 59% of the LGBF indicators, it has only improved on 41% of indicators relative to its Family Group and 42% compared to Scotland, suggesting other Councils are improving their performance to a higher level (see Figure 21.3).

**Figure 21.3 – How Fife’s performance on LGBF indicators compares over time, with family group and Scotland**

	Better	Worse	Unchanged
Fife over time	59%	40%	1%
Fife vs Family Group	41%	59%	0%
Fife vs Scotland	42%	58%	0%

The following narrative reviews and summarises performance for each of the Service areas within the benchmarking framework:

### **Culture and Leisure**

Cost of sports facilities, libraries, parks and open spaces, user satisfaction with, libraries, parks and open spaces, museums and galleries, and leisure services have all improved, with most performing better than Fife’s Family Group and Scotland overall.

Performance against the cost of museums and galleries has declined and performs worse compared with the Family Group and Scotland.

### **Children's Services**

Percentage of Pupils Gaining 5+ Awards at Level 5 and Level 6 and in the 20% most Deprived Areas, gross costs of 'Children Looked After' in residential-based services, proportion of pupils entering positive destinations, School exclusions rates, participation rate for 16–19-year-olds, and Overall Average Total Tariff and for quintiles 1-5 all improved, but performed worse than the Family Group or Scotland

Proportion of funded early years provision which is graded good/better, and proportion of children being looked after in the community also improved and performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

Adult’s satisfaction with schools, Literacy and numeracy, and gap, amongst P1, P4, and P7 pupils, gross costs of 'Children Looked After' in a community setting, cost of providing pre-school, primary, and secondary school places, school attendance rates, proportion of Children meeting developmental milestones, proportion of Child Protection re-registrations within 18 months, Proportion of Looked After Children with more than one placement in the last year, and Proportion of children living in poverty (after housing costs) all declined, and performed worse than Fife’s Family Group and Scotland.

### **Corporate Services**

The Gender pay gap, the proportion of the highest paid 5% of employees who are women, support services as a percentage of gross expenditure, Cost per dwelling of collecting Council Tax, and Proportion of Scottish Welfare Fund budget spent all improved and performed better than Fife’s Family Group and Scotland.

Sickness absence levels for all employees (teaching and non-teaching), percentage of invoices paid within 30 days, proportion of Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grant decisions within 15 days, and Proportion of Discretionary Housing Payment funding spent all declined and performed worse than the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Corporate Assets**

The percentage of operational buildings that are suitable for their current use and % of internal floor area of operational buildings in satisfactory condition improved in performance. The % of operational buildings performed worse, and the internal floor area performed better against the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Economic Development and Planning**

The percentage of unemployed people assisted into work from council programmes, Proportion of procurement spent on local enterprises, Investment in Economic Development and Tourism, the proportion of people earning less than the living wage, the proportion of properties receiving Superfast Broadband the claimant count for working age and 16-24s, have all improved, although only spend on local enterprises, Superfast Broadband and the Living Wage have performed better against the Family Group and Scotland.

The cost of Planning & Building Standards applications, the average time for processing Business and Industry Planning applications, the number of Business Gateway Start-ups, Town Centre Vacancy rates, Immediate available employment land as a % of total land allocated for employment purposes, and Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita, all declined, and performed worse compared to the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Environmental Services**

Net cost of Waste collection and waste disposal, Net cost of Street cleaning

Street cleanliness, Cost of roads per kilometre, Percentage of A B C classed roads and Unclassified roads considered for maintenance treatment, and Cost of Trading Standards and environmental health all improved. Only net cost of street cleaning performed worse than their Family Group and Scotland.

Cost of Trading Standards, Money Advice & Citizens Advice per 1,000 population, Proportion of total household waste arising that is recycled and Street cleaning, all declined, with only street cleaning performing better than the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Tackling Climate Change**

CO2 emissions per capita for - area wide, within scope of LA, Transport, and Electricity, all improved but generally performed worse compared with the Family Group and Scotland.

CO2 emissions for Natural Gas also declined but performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Financial Sustainability**

Total useable reserves as a % of council annual budgeted revenue, and Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream - General Fund, both improved, and performed better than their Family Group and Scotland.

Uncommitted General Fund Balance as a % of annual budgeted net revenue, Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream - Housing Revenue Account, and Actual outturn as a percentage of budgeted expenditure all declined, and only the uncommitted General Fund Balance performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Housing**

Rent due in the year lost due to Voids, proportion of Council Dwellings meeting Scottish Housing Quality Standards, the proportion of Council Dwellings that are Energy Efficient, and average number of days taken to complete non-emergency repairs all improved, and generally performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

Gross rent arrears as a percentage of rent due for the Year, declined, although performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

## **Adult Social Care**

Self-directed Support (SDS) Direct Payments (DP) Managed Personalised Budgets (MPB) spend on adults as a percentage of total Adult Social Work spend, and percentage of people 65+ with long-term care needs receiving personal care at home, all improved but performed worse compared with the Family Group and Scotland.

Home care costs per hour, % of adults supported at home who agree services improved/maintained their quality of life, supported them to live as independently as possible, agreed they had a say in how their help was provided, and feel supported to continue in their caring role, all declined, as did Rate of readmission to Hospital within 28 days, Residential costs per week per resident for people aged 65 or over, and proportion of adult care services graded good or better. All these indicators performed worse against the Family Group and Scotland. The number of days people spend in hospital when they are ready to be discharged also declined but performed better than the Family Group and Scotland.

## 22. Conclusions

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### **What this assessment tells us**

This assessment of a range of data and evidence tells us that Fife continues to face key challenges. These are persistent, wicked issues that are already known to us.

A common thread throughout this assessment has been poverty and inequality, reflecting the impact of wider economic factors on living standards at a very local level.

The State of Fife indicators highlight issues around equity. Inequality is widening and causing social, economic and environmental harm to people and communities in Fife.

Poorer life outcomes for individuals are firmly grounded in place, with Mid-Fife continuing to lag behind other areas of Fife. Place outcomes show growing need for improvement across Fife reflecting tightening budgets and difficult decisions around balancing protecting spending for education and health and social care, with the wider set of public services which councils traditionally have provided. This highlights the importance of joint working on place.

After a period of population growth, Fife is one of many council areas where population is starting to decline. With restrictions on migration since Britain's exit from the European Union, including being able to bring family members with them, fewer people of working age are coming to Scotland and the UK to work. The number of both children and working age are declining, but the older population will continue to grow in size.

In an uncertain context, what is most certain is that the Fife population is ageing, and this will drive demand for public services. The number of people in older age groups is increasing, and older people – particularly women – are likely to live longer in poorer health.

Changes of particular concern since the last assessment include: declining mental wellbeing of both children and adults, and worsening outcomes for children and young people.

The long-term impacts of poor educational outcomes for school-age children and young people are well known. These include a reduction in further and higher education participation, limited employment opportunities and earnings potential and poor health outcomes, all of which risk further entrenching poverty and inequality. The longer-term impacts of poor education and associated low incomes often fall to councils to resolve, which is why specific, targeted work is needed to reduce the equity gap at an early stage.

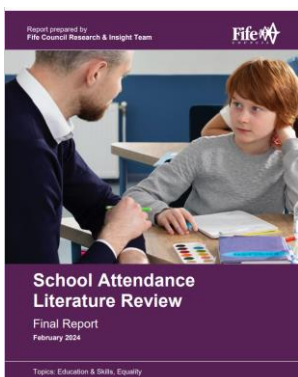
Addressing the impacts of climate change continues to be a strategic priority, cutting across services and outcomes. Those at highest risk of climate change hazards are often those that are least able to adapt. Factors impacting vulnerability include age, poverty, pre-existing health conditions, limited mobility, as well as specific locations and industries being adversely affected. Moving towards a fair and sustainable Fife requires improved evaluation of climate change risks, to help prioritise resilience action and ensure a just transition.

## Current research

The Fife Strategic Assessment 2024 has been informed by a number of targeted pieces of research that sought to update or fill gaps in our evidence base.

Alongside this report we have published a number of companion documents which provide more in-depth information on the issues highlighted. These are available for the following topics:

### School Attendance



### Place



### Connectivity



### Safer Fife



Work is underway with services and partners to:

- understand factors affecting young people's attendance at school, to help to identify interventions that can be put in place to support better outcomes for our children and young people. This will involve looking further into the effect of technology and changes to childhood with the knock-on effect on resilience and attendance, and the impact of technology.
- develop a composite fuel poverty index to direct targeting of support to reduce fuel poverty as part of Fife's local heat and energy efficiency strategy
- review the effectiveness of the rapid rehousing transition plan and update demand analytics around homelessness
- develop a corporate networked dataset to support improved use of spatial analysis in planning local services.

## Looking ahead

This assessment points to further areas for research and review to help us get a deeper understanding of:

- the challenges of a diminishing working age population, including the drivers and scale of economic inactivity to identify the policy measures needed, both to support more people into work and to provide employers with a skilled workforce able to support their needs.
- how and where Fife's communities are impacted by climate change, and the inequality in terms of those with reduced social infrastructure and increased deprivation are disproportionately affected. We plan to develop and test and methodology to look at community resilience to flood risk.



## Opportunities for partners

The first phase of Fife Partnership Leadership Summits sought to broaden the involvement and influence of Fife Partnership leaders and senior managers in the design and delivery of the Plan for Fife. Together, leaders explored opportunities to work together and drive public sector reform. From this four strategic change ambitions and leadership commitments emerged:

### **Fife Partnership Strategic Change Ambitions and Leadership Commitments 2023**

1. Put Community Wealth Building (CWB) at the heart of what we're doing, so we actively engage and work with local business, start-ups and third sector to win more of our work; reach out our recruitment to local communities; prioritise CWB within our key strategies e.g. economy, climate, health.
2. Live up to the Place Principle, so we work through a shared approach to how we inform, plan, review and engage locally; adjust our structures and operating arrangements to enable locally responsive teamwork; make resource decisions together.
3. Implement system change in how we are supporting people and families to improve their quality of opportunity and life, so we commit to share knowledge, review our referral approaches, and redesign processes; join up our access and information; lead and invest in multi-service team working and skills.
4. Prioritise health and wellbeing when we plan our places and services, so we invest in local community groups to facilitate local action; design our workplaces and the services they deliver to improve physical activity and health and wellbeing; work to create community networks and use all our assets to support physical activity and health and wellbeing, especially our green spaces.

This report provides context that will add to the research and insight developed by partners individually. Considered in the round, it can help shape the change required to ensure Fife's public services continue to be responsive and sustainable for the future.

The evidence in the assessment informed the Fife Partnership Board decision in May 2024 to maintain focus and action against the existing Recovery & Renewal Priorities for 2024-2027. It can further be used to shape the development of the Fife Partnership collaborative programme over this year to 2027. The purpose of the programme is to scope priority collaborative projects partners will focus on which have the potential to offer scale and to therefore make a greater impact against our priorities more quickly.

The strong theme of inequality revealed in the analysis – which is a challenge for all partners in addressing the social determinants of health – indicates the value in taking a whole system lens to our work to shape investment, redesign opportunities and resource allocations as part of collaborative programme development for the remainder of the plan to 2027.

Partners are encouraged to use this report to:

- Compare and consider findings with related research
- Explore and question organisational priorities
- Consider shared objectives, the use of collective resources with other partners
- Explore the levers within Fife and the Fife Partnership's control that could help address the challenges in new ways such as - land, assets and public spending.

## 23. Resources

The following companion resources are available to support further exploration of the findings in this assessment:

People	Resource	Link
3. Population	Population (National Records of Scotland)	<a href="https://nrsotland.gov.uk">Population   National Records of Scotland (nrsotland.gov.uk)</a>
4. Housing	Homelessness Statistics	<a href="https://www.gov.scot">Homelessness statistics - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)</a>
5. Poverty	Fife findings – Children in Low Income Families 2023	<a href="#">Fife Findings Children in Low Income Families 2023</a>
6. Children and young people	2018-based Population Projections  Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023 School Attendance Review StoryMap - Fife's Play Sufficiency Assessment 2023	<a href="https://nrsotland.gov.uk">Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2018-based)   National Records of Scotland (nrsotland.gov.uk)</a> <a href="#">Director of Public Health Report 2023   NHS Fife</a> <a href="#">School-attendance-literature-review-final.pdf (fife.scot)</a> <a href="#">Fife's Play Sufficiency Assessment (arqgis.com)</a>
7. Working age	2018-based Population Projections	<a href="https://nrsotland.gov.uk">Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2018-based)   National Records of Scotland (nrsotland.gov.uk)</a>
8. Economy	Fife Local Area Economic profiles 2022-23	<a href="#">Fife Local Area Economic Profiles 2022-23</a>
9. Older people	2018-based Population Projections	<a href="https://nrsotland.gov.uk">Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2018-based)   National Records of Scotland (nrsotland.gov.uk)</a>
10. Health and wellbeing	ScotPHO profiling tool	<a href="https://shinyapps.io">ScotPHO profiles (shinyapps.io)</a>
11. Safer Fife	Topic Report – Safer Fife	<a href="#">Safer-Fife-report-Jun-24.pdf</a>
12. Place and wellbeing	Topic report – Our Place	<a href="#">Our-Place-Fife-2023.pdf</a>

Place	Resource	Link
13. Connectivity	Topic report – Connectivity Scottish Living Locally Data Portal (SLLDP) Scottish Living Locally Data Portal – Fife Overview Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods	<a href="#">Connectivity report</a> <a href="#">Scottish Living Locally Data Portal (SLLDP)</a> <a href="#">Scottish Living Locally Data Portal - Fife Overview</a> <a href="#">Local Living and 20-Minute Neighbourhoods (arcgis.com)</a>
14. Spatial issues	Local Development Plan Evidence Report Adopted Local Development Plan FIFEplan interactive mapping	<a href="#">Local Development Plan Evidence Report</a> <a href="#">Adopted FIFEplan</a> <a href="#">FIFEplan interactive mapping</a>
15. Environment	Scottish Energy Statistics Hub NHS Fife Land Use Navigator Green and Blue Networks  Priority Places for Food Index 2	<a href="#">Scottish Energy Statistics Hub (shinyapps.io)</a> <a href="#">NHS Fife Land use view (arcgis.com)</a> <a href="#">Green and Blue Networks Reports   Fife Council</a> <a href="#">CDRC Mapmaker: Priority Places for Food Index (Version 2) (Overall decile)</a>
Performance	Resource	Link
16. Plan for Fife Ambitions	Plan for Fife Annual Review of Priorities and Ambitions 2023	<a href="#">Plan for Fife Annual Review of Priorities and Ambitions 2023</a>
17. State of Fife	ScotPHO profiling tool	<a href="#">ScotPHO profiles (shinyapps.io)</a>
18. Community planning outcomes	Community Planning Outcomes Profiling (CPOP) Tool	<a href="#">CPOP (shinyapps.io)</a> Go to CPP over time
19. Neighbourhood improvement	Community Planning Outcomes Profiling (CPOP) Tool	<a href="#">CPOP (shinyapps.io)</a> Go to My Communities or Community Profile
20. Views on Council Services	Scottish Household Survey	<a href="#">SHS Data Explorer (shinyapps.io)</a>
21. How Fife compares	Local Government Benchmarking framework (LGBF)	<a href="#">Explore the data   Benchmarking (improvementservice.org.uk)</a>

# About this report

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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.

## Contact

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KnowFife Hub

<https://know.fife.scot>

## Important Notes on this Report

1. Since 2017, Fife Council's Research and Insight Team have committed to producing a Fife Strategic Assessment, every three years, to support the Plan for Fife (local outcome improvement plan).
2. This brings together into a single document, a definitive synthesis of the latest research evidence and assessment of the shared challenges facing local communities and partner agencies in Fife.
3. In between, Local Strategic Assessments have been produced for each of the 7 areas to inform local community planning. The next Local Strategic Assessments will be 2025.
4. The Fife Strategic Assessment 2024 is intended to provide strategic insight and challenge, to inform the three year review of the Plan for Fife, ahead of the next 10 year plan from 2027.
5. Through the lenses of People, Place and Performance, the most recent evidence and emerging issues are reviewed to inform discussions about the next stage of planning of priorities to deliver on the ambitions of the Plan for Fife 2017-2027.