falkirk & clackmannanshire
carerscentre

Meeting Minutes

Consultations for carers to share their views with external organisations

FOR FALKIRK CARERS

Conversation with Philomena Bain and Nicola Millar Children with Disabilities Social Work Managers

Held on 24th April 2026

at The Carers Centre, Falkirk

Quick recap

This meeting was an introductory session about Falkirk Council's Children with Disabilities team, where Nicola Millar and Philomena Bain explained a little more about the work that they do.

The team, which works with children at the high end of complexity, operates with a small staff team, not every child with a disability will be support by the children with disability social work team, many families are supported by locality social work teams. Philomena and team support other social work teams where there is a Section 23. There is currently a waiting list for Section 23 assessments.

Key topics discussed criteria for support from the team, the Activity Scheme's importance and funding, challenges with personal care services, lack of options for parent Carers to have a break and transition planning for young people moving from children to adult services.

Parents raised concerns about gaps in support, particularly for children who don't meet strict criteria but still need assistance and discussed the need for better coordination between schools and social services to address social and peer connection issues. The session also covered the team's duty system, resource allocation processes, with participants expressing appreciation for the team's commitment despite their small size.

Nicola and Philomena hope that the term respite will be replaced with short breaks, due to the negative connotations with the word respite.

Children with Disabilities Team Overview

Nicola and Philomena provided introductions about their roles in the Children with Disabilities team at Falkirk Council. They explained the team's aims, including connecting families to appropriate services, advocating for equal opportunities, and providing high-quality support tailored to individual needs. The team was described as small and focused on supporting children with high complexity needs, with specific criteria which determines who the team can support and which families would be supported by other social work teams.

Nicola highlighted that their team focus on supporting young people with complex additional needs while also ensuring child protection concerns are investigated, supporting looked-after children (LAC) and looked after and accommodated children (LAAC). Nicola explained that a sole diagnose of ADHD or Autism would not fit the teams criteria, however the team works very closely with locality teams and the initial response team.

Activity Scheme

Philomena assured the group that the Activity Scheme has secure funding and senior management recognition, while acknowledging gaps in commissioned services for children who don't meet the criteria to attend the activity scheme.

Resource Allocation and Support Programs

Nicola explained the resource allocation process, noting that decisions are made monthly with authority up to £300 for assistant team managers, and anything above that requires senior management approval.

Philomena spoke about her hopes to host a Mellow Parent programme for parents of children with additional needs, she hopes that this programme was start in autumn with space for approximately 6-8 participants.

There are currently only 3 services on the framework that can support families, Nicola hopes to have more onboard soon.

A Carer mentioned Self Directed Support option 2 and Philomena said that the team are trying to find solutions for this, Nicola commented that many providers don't provide personal care and this is creating a lack of options for Carers. Philomena said that many of the care companies won't take small packages that are only 1 or 2 hours per week.

There was conversation about Tayavalla and how this short break service is used by Stirling and Clackmannanshire too, this service makes sure that children using the service are all good matches for each other, this is great, however comes with its own challenges ie there is space for a young person but that young person's needs wouldn't fit well with the other young people who are already receiving support.

Philomena said that sometimes out of area placement is the only option and as a team, they need to make sure that this option is the best thing for the Carer and the child/young person.

Nicola emphasized the need for a child's plan or Form 4 to be in place, Nicola also stressed the importance of parents having access to copies of their child's assessments and care plans, and explained the current system where not all children have allocated social workers, though support is still available through a duty system.

Philomena finished the session by saying every young person should have a positive destination, it is important that you have a copy of your child's plan and your child's school can provide you with this if they have not already. If you have been waiting a long time or your situation has changed, please do reach out to the Carers Centre or if urgent/ appropriate the duty social work team.

Carers Views/ comments when Nicola asked what the team could do better?

A Carer raised concerns about social isolation for children with additional needs, particularly those who are not sporty or don't have connections at mainstream high schools, suggesting a need for more peer group opportunities and social connections.

A Carer spoke about the transition processes from school to adulthood, expressing concerns about the lack of clear planning for positive destinations and the need for better coordination between schools and services.

A Carer asked how to get a Section 23, Philomena commented that this is part of a child's assessment if they are under 18 and if they are over 18 the adult social work team can do this.

A Carer suggested that schools create a tick list or visual tracker for children's progress, similar to a checklist, to help parents and organizations track that the young person is on track and any actions needed are taken.

A Carer commented that there needs to be a bigger team of children with disabilities social workers, many Carers agreed with this comment.

Suggestions were made by Carers to improve processes, including publishing RAG meeting timetables and sharing Section 23 report accountability. The conversation also touched on the Activity Scheme's benefits and limitations, with a suggestion to explore alternative care options that offer more flexibility.

A Carer asked about advocacy in the team and Nicola spoke about their young person’s advocacy group; this group helps to shape positive change with young people.

A Carer asked about the transition support page, Philomena said that this work is ongoing.

A Carer was keen to learn how many families are supported by the team, Nicola and Philomena did not have numbers to share on the day, this Carer suggested that numbers were published so Carers were aware of the amount of families supported by the team.

A Carer mentioned that other local authorities don’t have an activity scheme, this Carer feels fortunate to have this support.

A Carer mentioned that a good support to her was TOCH at Denny church.

A Carer commented that she had not heard of the activity scheme, she wanted to know more, and Philomena and Nicola offered to chat with this Carer during the break.

A Carer commented that the activity scheme was amazing.

A Carer commented about the lack of providers in Falkirk that can support Carers to choose Option 2 of the self-directed support options.

A Carer spoke about a time when she needed help from the health visiting team, she felt that as she lived in a clean home and had a good job, she was seen as coping well when the reality was very different.

A Carer mentioned that they have no minutes from meetings that they have attended at their child's school, this Carer was advised to contact the school and ask for these.

A Carer mentioned that people cannot access free personal care until they are 18 years old, there was discussion that this age should be decreased.

A Carer commented that Lisa at active schools is amazing, other Carers in the room agreed with this comment.

A Carer commented that the activity scheme is a fantastic resource, however not always the best fit for every child, her child felt very different to others and did not want to return, there wasn't another option for this young person.

A Carer commented that Fiona Douglas and Sandra Mcallister have been a great help, this Carer found all aspects of transition scary, this Carer commented that the social work team have been fantastic too and they don't know what they would have done without their support.

A Carer commented that their young person is transitioning to adult services soon, they are worried that planning at school has not commenced, Nicola and Philomena chatted with this Carer at the break.

A Carer commented that loosing school is a worrying reality.

A Carer commented that although her child is older, they too found the thought of losing school a worry and that they found it very difficult to adjust from 5 days at school to a few days at college.

A Carer commented that duty social work waiting lists are too long, many Carers agreed with this comment.

Carers discussed challenges with support services for young people with autism and ADHD, explaining that often children/young people don't meet the high criteria for specialized disability programs but are also not suitable for mainstream groups. Some Carers feel that these young people are caught in the middle, without appropriate support.

Slides from the day can be found here: https://centralcarers.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/CWDT-April-2026.pptx