

Plan 27 Conversations

The Challenge Ahead

The purpose of this document is to support conversations about the key issues that will shape Fife over the next decade and inform a reset of the Plan for Fife – our local outcome improvement plan - in 2027.

Its role is to stimulate debate and longer-term thinking about our common agenda and the collective action required from us as public and third sector organisations. This is an opportunity to shape Fife's future and national thinking on public services.

Under four broad themes, we've summarised key activity from the previous 10-year Plan period, ongoing challenges, and future opportunities.



Great places



Healthy lives



**A chance
for everyone**



**Equipped for the
future**

Much of the existing practice in Fife and many of the issues raised here already indicate that Fife is implementing much of the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform agenda - prevention, partnership working, place-based approaches, better use of collective resources. Instead of seeing the debate on Public Service Reform as a separate programme of activity, we can consider it as part of our conversation about how organisations, communities and partnerships respond to long-term challenges and opportunities for Fife.

→ **This paper is designed to facilitate discussion on the key issues facing us and our response. We would appreciate all feedback and specifically around the following questions:**

- Does this reflect your experience of the key challenges and opportunities facing Fife, and what, if anything, are we missing or need to understand differently?
- Looking ahead, where should we focus our collective effort and resources to make the greatest progress?
- Thinking about how we work together and suggested shared principles, how would you improve or develop these to support our next steps?

→ Answer these questions at **our.fife.scot/plan27feedback**
Find out more information at our.fife.scot/plan27
Contact fife.partnership@fife.gov.uk





Places have a powerful impact on residents' health, wellbeing and quality of life, while their attractiveness to visitors and businesses has economic impacts.



Did you know?

The lowest-rated aspect of life in Fife is people's sense of influence and control over local decisions



Looking back

Over the past 10 years we've invested in a wide range of ways to try and create stronger, thriving, sustainable places.

We've invested in housing, infrastructure, regeneration and environmental improvement to strengthen communities and enhance local places. Overall, more than 13,000 new homes were built in Fife in the last ten years. This included 4,268 new affordable homes completed by Registered Social Landlords. Investment in local infrastructure, active travel and transport has improved access within and between communities

There's been more emphasis on regeneration and placemaking. Regional economic partnerships and programmes such as Levenmouth Regeneration have attracted investment and created jobs. We've invested in public spaces, town centres and community assets, supporting efforts to create vibrant and sustainable places. Community planning, locality working and support for community organisations has sought to strengthen residents' contribution to shaping local priorities and services. Fife's extensive coastlines, parks, greenspaces and internationally important habitats support health and wellbeing, biodiversity and tourism. Climate action, renewable energy, low-carbon transport and nature-based solutions have formed part of wider efforts to improve environmental sustainability and resilience.



Looking around

Life is still experienced differently in places around Fife - too many communities are held back by their local environment, uneven access to services, housing and wider opportunities.

The current housing emergency reflects national challenges around housing supply, affordability and homelessness. Demographic change is putting pressure on local services and infrastructure. The legacy of former industrial activity is clear in many places, including vacant and derelict land, while town centres are slowly adapting to new patterns of retail, service use and economic activity.

Some communities experience greater disadvantage, higher crime rates, poorer health outcomes and weaker connectivity than others. Access to services, facilities, local assets and opportunities vary across Fife. Financial pressures, demographic change and different demands and expectations raise questions about the long-term sustainability of services in some geographical areas. As these trends develop, issues of community cohesion, trust in public services and local resilience are emerging.

→ Looking ahead - Our key challenges

- **Physical places** – Town centres, local high streets and visitor destinations must adapt to changing patterns of retail, service use and economic activity. At the same time, communities disadvantaged by industrial decline require regeneration to make them liveable and productive for future generations.
- **Community cohesion and trust** – Great places depend on people - on strong relationships, local leadership and community confidence. Concerns about crime, antisocial behaviour, service provision and wider inequalities affect how people experience, and participate in, our communities. Partners need to respond better to local priorities to address issues of community cohesion and trust.
- **Places left behind** – Varied access to opportunities, services, connectivity and community is creating unequal experiences and outcomes between people and places. The challenge is to sustain the facilities, networks and local infrastructure that support quality of life - responding to differing local circumstances and prioritising areas facing greater disadvantages - despite the pressure on finances and resources.



Health is fundamental to quality of life and underpins all our other ambitions.



Did you know?

36% of people not in work gave their reason as long term sick or disabled.



Looking back

Over the past 10 years we invested heavily in different services, workstreams and facilities.

We have invested in tackling poverty, improving wellbeing and supporting independent living. In community facilities, family support, welfare and advice, employability programmes, digital inclusion and preventative approaches to health. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted community strengths in volunteering, unpaid care, community action and assets - all of which play a vital role in health and wellbeing.



Looking around

Life expectancy is stalling. And it's lowest where disadvantage is greatest.

Demand for health and social care services is growing alongside rising costs, persistent inequalities, poor mental health and substance use.

More people are living with long-term conditions and complex needs, creating pressure across hospitals, primary care, community health services, social care provision and social work services. And it's now the main reason for economic inactivity.

We have high rates of emergency hospital admissions, alcohol and drug-related harm, and chronic disease. People across Fife don't have the same opportunities to be physically active, socially connected or access healthy environments.

→ Looking ahead - Our key challenges

- **Social determinants of health** – Health outcomes are shaped by social, economic and environmental factors, many of which lie beyond the direct control of health and social care services. Without progress on underlying drivers, such as poverty, employment, housing, education, and the environment, demand for health and social care services is likely to continue to rise while health inequalities remain.
- **Community health and social care services** – Rising levels of long-term illness, disability, poor mental health and complex need are creating growing demand across primary care, community health provision, social care provision and social work services. Changing demographics, workforce pressures and financial constraints make it harder to meet need within available resources. More upstream support could reduce hospital admissions and pressure on acute services.
- **Population health and wellbeing** – Physical activity, social connection and access to healthy environments are key to healthy lives, but opportunities and motivation remain unevenly distributed. With rising levels of inactivity, poor mental health, substance use, and preventable illness, future generations aren't on track to spend more of their lives in good health.

A Chance for Everyone



Talent and potential are distributed across the community - opportunity is not.



Did you know?

2 of Fife's 4 constituencies are among the 10 poorest in Scotland



Looking back

Over the past 10 years we've focussed on improving life chances from early childhood through to adulthood with a range of services and interventions.

We've invested in early years, family support, education, employability and skills to reduce barriers and improve outcomes at key stages of life. Child poverty remains a significant challenge, although reductions have been supported by local action on income maximisation and cost of living support. Improved targeting has helped more people access support when they need it.

There's been a growing emphasis on community empowerment, participation and lived experience, supported by community organisations, volunteers and local partnerships. Communities are playing a greater role in shaping services, policy and local priorities through participatory budgeting and other engagement approaches. Fife's commitment to community wealth building reflects a wider ambition to reduce inequality.



Looking around

The inequality gap is still growing - its impact emerges early and can last a lifetime.

People's life chances are shaped by a combination of social, economic and environmental factors. Poverty, health, education, employment, transport, digital access and community connections all influence people's ability to participate, contribute and thrive. Significant support exists but people can still experience multiple barriers, limiting opportunities and long-term outcomes.

Significant inequalities remain between people and places, particularly across Mid-Fife. 13.9% of Fife's children are living in relative poverty before housing costs. This rises to 16.2% after housing costs, and ranges from 6.6% to 26.0% in Fife areas.

Speech and language concerns are over three times higher in the most deprived communities. Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing are increasingly affecting young people, and 41.8% of school pupils have an additional support need.

Initial positive destinations for school leavers are at record levels and educational attainment has improved over time, but results and employability outcomes still vary between communities and groups. There are disparities across our schools and wider concerns about youth unemployment and mental health.

→ Looking ahead - Our key challenges

- **Educational attainment** – There are persistent gaps between communities that start early in life and growing concerns about children's mental health, additional support needs and educational outcomes. The right conditions are needed for all young people to achieve their potential.
- **Ready and able to work** – Multiple and complex factors affect people's ability to access and sustain employment, including ill-health, caring responsibilities, accessible childcare, changing labour market demands and wider barriers to participation.
- **Whole family and community wellbeing** – Disadvantage is rarely the result of a single issue. Interconnected challenges are experienced across families and communities, requiring coordinated support from services including education, health, social work and the third sector. This raises questions about how strong community organisations, networks and support systems are - and how they help people overcome barriers, feel they belong and aspire to achieve their full potential.

Equipped for the future



Fife is experiencing significant economic, environmental, technological and demographic change.



Did you know?

By 2037 Fife's older population is projected to increase by 23.6% while the number of children falls by 13.4%.



Looking back

Over the past 10 years we've worked to develop skills, infrastructure, connectivity, climate resilience and inclusive local prosperity.

We've laid strong foundations for future prosperity and resilience. Investment in infrastructure and connectivity, including the Queensferry Crossing and the Leven Rail Link, has improved access to opportunities and supported economic growth. Superfast broadband coverage now reaches almost all Fife premises. Economic outcomes have improved, employment is above pre-pandemic levels, earnings are increasing over time with more employers committing to the Real Living Wage.

Fife has focused on sectors that will shape its future economy. Energy transition, advanced manufacturing, tourism and programmes like the Forth Green Freeport are attracting investment. We've prioritised skills development, fair work and community wealth building to help ensure local people benefit from economic growth.

Climate adaptation work has expanded, carbon emissions have reduced over time, and major work is underway to develop future energy infrastructure through the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy.



Looking around

Fife's institutions may have insufficient resource and struggle to adapt fast enough to the changing world around us.

Future prosperity will depend on resilience and adaptation as well as economic growth. The economy is going through a period of transition with significant shifts in demography, climate, technology, economic structures and public service demand. Our biggest challenge isn't economic growth but adapting successfully to these changes while ensuring the benefits are captured locally and shared equitably.

Economic growth will depend on transport, digital and energy infrastructure keeping pace with change. Fife supports around 9,000 businesses, yet constraints around employment land, premises and connectivity continue to affect growth opportunities in some areas.

There's more emphasis on regional economic partnerships for government funding allocations, raising the challenge of managing funding pots between areas with distinct issues and priorities. The scale and pace of change is likely to exceed the capacity of our existing systems, available finances, workforce skills and processes.

→ Looking ahead - Our key challenges

- **Skills and future workforce** – The nature of work is being reshaped by technology, AI, the energy transition and workforce needs. Demographic change and economic inactivity are reducing the available labour pool. People, employers and institutions must adapt quickly to equip current and future generations with the skills needed to benefit from future economic opportunities.
- **Infrastructure and connectivity** – Future prosperity will depend on the capacity of our infrastructure to improve access to opportunities and respond to changing demands. There are disparities across Fife in the availability and quality of infrastructure, employment land and business premises. Investment and connectivity must keep pace with future needs and opportunities.
- **Climate adaptation and resilience** – With almost 190km of coastline and increasing exposure to flooding and extreme weather events, adapting communities, infrastructure and businesses to climate change will be critical to Fife's future resilience, while ensuring a just transition to a low-carbon economy.

Find out more about the challenge ahead at our.fife.scot/plan27

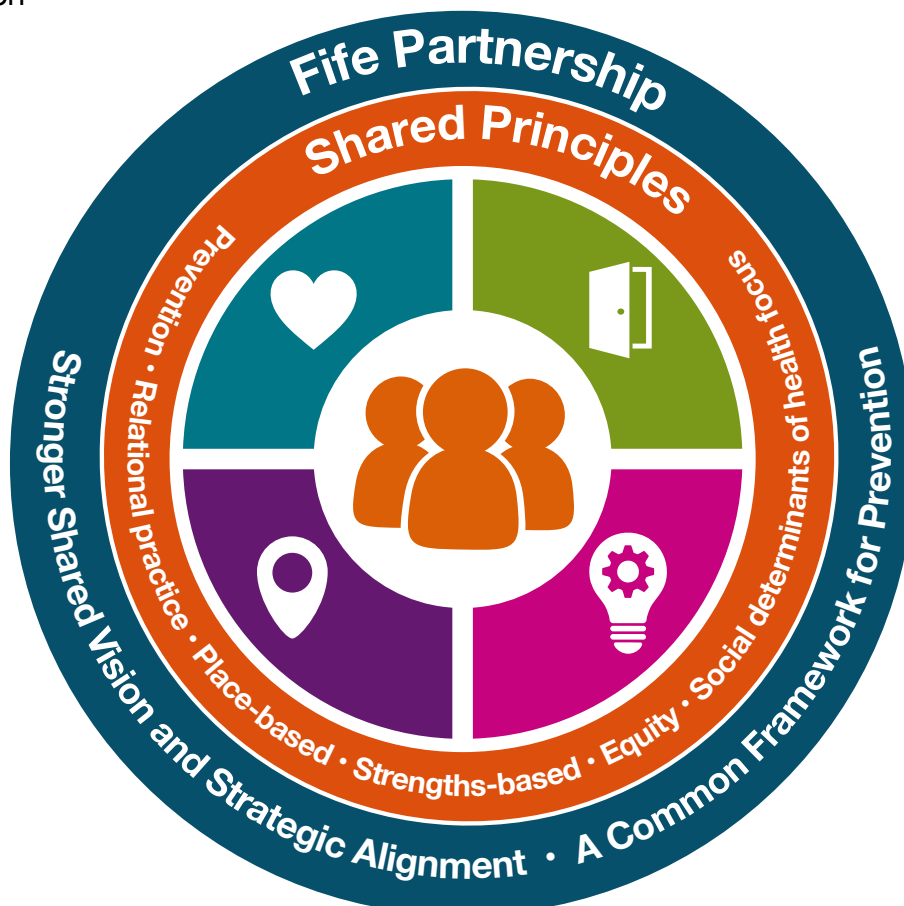
How We Work

The challenges outlined above are deeply interconnected. The four broad themes are shaped by many of the same underlying factors and cannot be addressed by individual organisations acting alone. Many of these issues are reflected in emerging thinking on Public Service Reform at national level and in approaches such as the Marmot framework. These recognise that long-term challenges require coordinated action across organisational, professional and sector boundaries.

The challenge to ourselves is what we do next and how we work together more effectively. Organisations will continue to have distinct responsibilities, but future progress depends much more on collective leadership, shared priorities and coordinated action across public services.

The evidence collated suggests that some **shared principles** should underpin all our work. These are offered as a starting point for discussion about the values and behaviours that could support community planning in Fife over the next 10 years:

- **Prevention** – recognising the importance of acting early and addressing factors that shape outcomes before problems reach crisis point
- **Relational** – placing relationships, trust and shared understanding at the heart of how partners work together and how support is provided
- **Place-based** – recognising that different communities experience different challenges and opportunities and may require different responses
- **Strengths-based** – building on the assets, capabilities and potential that exist within people, communities and organisations
- **Equity** – recognising that different people experience different circumstances and may require different levels of support to achieve fairer outcomes
- **Social determinants of health** – recognising that health and wellbeing are shaped by a wide range of social, economic and environmental factors that extend beyond the remit of any single organisation



How does our community planning partnership need to evolve to meet the challenges?

We've outlined some potential reforms for community planning in Fife to provoke discussion and help shape the development of our next joint plan and the system that governs and delivers it.

→ Stronger Shared Vision and Strategic Alignment

While organisations and partnerships already have their own plans and priorities, it is less clear how far these combine to support a shared long-term ambition for Fife. This raises questions of how individual organisational priorities contribute to broader outcomes, the extent of collective ownership for those outcomes, and the relationship between long-term ambition and medium-term planning.

The strategic landscape has become increasingly complex, with multiple plans, strategies and delivery arrangements contributing to shared outcomes. There is an opportunity to consider how priorities are reviewed and refreshed over time, how individual organisational plans connect to collective ambitions, and whether greater alignment could help remove duplication and promote common purpose.

→ A Common Framework for Prevention

This paper highlights the importance of prevention. As understanding grows of the social, economic and environmental factors that shape outcomes throughout people's lives, there would be value in having a common framework, such as the 8 pillars of the Marmot approach. The aim would be to strengthen shared understanding, support collective learning and provide a common framework for adjusting priorities.

→ How we Collaborate

Partnership structures need to be flexible to respond to emerging issues, opportunities and place-specific circumstances given the complexity of the challenges ahead. This might mean moving away from organising partnerships around standing themes. This also invites consideration of how the Partnership draws on expertise from beyond the formal structures, how learning and improvement are supported, and how collective effort is organised around both long-term priorities and shorter-term challenges.

This paper has been produced by Fife Council on behalf of Fife Partnership

Share your views at our.fife.scot/plan27feedback

For more information or if you've any questions
please contact: fife.partnership@fife.gov.uk



Selection of key facts of Fife

To support understanding of the issues and challenges, testing what the evidence is telling us and helping to identify where policy or system change could improve outcomes.

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



Great Places



94%

of adults rate their area as a **good/very good** place to live



72% of adults live **within 5 minutes** walking distance to the nearest green or blue space



Town-centre vacancy rates are low/falling in St Andrews, Burmīland and Inverkeithing but high/rising in Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline and Lochgelly

23% of adults in Scotland reported **feelings of loneliness**.

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%).

11% of adults in Fife

reported that they experienced **discrimination** and **8%** reported that they experienced **harassment** in the last 12 months.

Both of these are more common in Fife than in Scotland (7% discrimination, 5% harassment).



Healthy Lives



81.1 years

life expectancy of **females** (Scottish average 81.1)

76.7 years

life expectancy of **males** (Scottish average 80.8)



Men in the **most affluent areas** of Fife live on average **13.9 years longer** than those in the most deprived areas



39% of adults aged 16 and over had a limiting long term physical or mental health condition or illness



Long-term sick is the largest reason given for not being in employment or seeking work in Fife (economically inactive)



25,019.2

Emergency admissions for people aged 65+ in Fife (23,998.6 for Scotland)



A Chance for Everyone



3.8%

Fife's **unemployment** rate is **lower** than the rate for Scotland as a whole (4.0%)



8,455 children (13.9%)

were in **relative poverty before housing costs** in Fife in 2025.

9,880 (16.2%) after housing costs.



11.7% of jobs

paid less than the Real Living Wage in 2023, compared with 10.1% for Scotland



In June 2026, Fife's claimant rate was **3.3%** with an estimated **7,525 people** **claiming out-of-work** benefits in the region.

Kirkcaldy Area had the highest number and rate of people claiming out-of-work benefits



16.5%

of children in Fife had **at least one developmental concern** recorded at their 27–30-month review, similar to the Scottish average of 16.7%.

24.7%

of children living in the **most deprived communities** have a developmental concern recorded at their 27–30-month review, compared with **6.8% in the least deprived areas**



Equipped for the Future



Fife's Positive Destinations for school leavers is at the **highest level in 15 years** (95.6% compared to 95.7% for Scotland)



90.8%

of 16-to-19-year-olds in Fife are participating in education, employment or training, compared to 92.7% for Scotland.



In 2024 for the first and second years after starting up, Fife's business survival rates were similar to national survival rates

For the third year after starting up, Fife's business survival rate was lower than the Scottish rate (54.1% compared with 57.6%)



In 2023, Fife's **job density** (0.66) was **lower than that for Scotland as a whole** (0.83) (fewer jobs per resident of working age).



In 2024, Fife's business density was **282 businesses per 10,000 resident adults**, a lower density than that for Scotland as a whole (372)



The number of 'high growth' businesses in Fife increased significantly **from 215 to 395** companies between 2024 and 2025, the highest number recorded since this dataset began (2013)