



Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum Bulletin March 2026

Welcome to the third in our series of regular bulletins discussing Recovery in Aberdeenshire and events influencing folk with lived and living experience (LLE) and their families at a local, regional and national level.

In this bulletin,

Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum: A New Chapter!

New groups are starting up across Aberdeenshire expanding the range and accessibility of peer-led support available.

- New SMART Groups launch in Aberdeenshire
- New and Old – Changes in Family Support Groups and Services
- Groups in the North
- Job Club in Huntly
- Focus on Women – Banchory Women’s Group Podcast

Changing Government Strategy and Improving Services

- Partners and Services - Increased Access to Rehab and Signs of Wider Access to Support
- Rae House Celebrates First Year
- Scottish Government Publish New Drug and Alcohol Strategy

Ensuring Lived and Living Experience is at the centre of drug and alcohol related decision making

- Voices of Recovery – Is someone listening?
- Introduction of LLE Panels in Aberdeenshire and a New Partnership Delivery Framework

We hope this bulletin informs and inspires community members to get involved, share their views and help us all make a difference.

Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum: A New Chapter!

What you need to know

In November 2025, the 3 Aberdeenshire recovery forums, in the North, Central and South, agreed to pool resources to form one forum covering the whole of the Shire. Various factors had led to this decision, including the exclusion of the forums from the Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) and the withdrawal of the associated annual funding. Although challenging, this has also presented an opportunity for an exciting new start.

First Meeting of the New Forum – 23rd March

The first meeting of the Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum will take place from 2 pm until 4 pm on Monday 23rd March at the Aberdeenshire Community Recovery Wellbeing Hub in Huntly. Please come along from 1.30 pm to join us for some refreshments beforehand.



<i>Creative Recovery in the Shire</i>		
MON 23 MARCH	FILM SCREENING FISH & CHIPS 5-7:30PM THE WELLBEING HUB	SCREENING FILMS MADE BY CREATIVE RECOVERY INVERCLYDE
TUE 24 MARCH	CREATIVE WRITING ZINE MAKING 10AM-4PM THE WELLBEING HUB LUNCH PROVIDED	CREATIVE WRITING AND MAKING SMALL PUBLICATIONS
WED 25 MARCH	INTRO TO FILMMAKING 10AM-12:30PM THE WELLBEING HUB LUNCH PROVIDED MOVEMENT / DANCE 1:30- 4PM HUB	STORYBOARDING AND FILMMAKING DANCE AND MOVEMENT
THU 26 MARCH	BREAKFAST SHOW AND TELL 9:30 - 11:30AM THE WELLBEING HUB	SHOWCASING WHAT WE HAVE DONE ALL WEEK
BOOK NOW!	CONTACT: DIANE@ACR.SCOT	
FOR PEOPLE WITH LIVED OR LIVING EXPERIENCE OF RECOVERY, AND THE FAMILIES WHO SUPPORT THEM.		
WORKSHOPS LED BY ARTISTS FROM CREATIVE RECOVERY INVERCLYDE		
LOCATION: ABERDEENSHIRE WELLBEING HUB, HUNTLY		

There is also the option to stay for Aberdeenshire Community Recovery’s *Creative Recovery in the Shire* event which will take place from 5 pm until 7.30 pm and includes a film screening and a supper. There will be no charge for this but it must be booked in advance.

Help with transport is available and we can offer travel expenses for those attending the meeting. This meeting is a great chance to find out more about your new Forum and to connect with others in the recovery community across Aberdeenshire. Whether you are a person in recovery, a family member or a professional interested in this area, everyone is welcome!

If you would like to become more involved in the Forum as a member, or if you would just like to receive information on what’s happening locally through our mailing list, please email Forum secretary Susan Weetman on aberdeenshirerecoveryforum@gmail.com.

If you want to be involved at any level, get in touch through our email aberdeenshirerecoveryforum@gmail.com and follow our Facebook page www.facebook.com/aberdeenshirerecoveryforum

Why do we need a Community Forum?

There has been a Drug and Alcohol Community Forum in Aberdeenshire for almost 20 years. Aberdeenshire Council and NHS were well ahead of most other areas when it came to listening to community representatives throughout their Community Planning structure. Those forums were well supported by the Community Learning and Development team (CLD). Many thanks to all of the CLD staff for keeping the Forums together for years.

In 2025, the Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership decided to change their relationship with the Lived and Living Experienced (LLE) recovery community to match Scottish Government guidance on community engagement. The Community Forums were no longer supported and their replacement will be a panel structure restricted only to individuals with LLE.

Some of the Community Forum members agreed to stay together, however, as they recognised the benefits of the regular connections and felt the transition to a panel structure removed the benefits of existing local networks.

The new Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum was formally created in 2025 to keep the existing networks alive and help the formation of new recovery groups. Everyone agrees it is good to talk and listen which is why the Scottish Government gives priority to LLE and to human rights advocacy. Everyone's recovery story is different which is why an LLE representative should have the opportunity to listen to as many people as possible. The forum structure gives people the opportunity to meet regularly and report on what is happening in local areas which can be shared with services and other groups. Over the years the Forum has helped to create recovery groups which are still functioning and their experience is shared with areas who want to create new groups.

The new Forum is now up and running with three trustees and a new membership. Sub-groups will be formed to manage the funds, communications and administration. There is room on the committee for anyone who wants to form a sub-group or local network. We no longer need to follow the ADP structure of North, Central and South areas, the network can evolve where there are clusters of groups and hopefully spread throughout the whole of the Shire.

If you would like to become more involved in the Forum as a member, a committee member or if you would just like to receive information on what's happening locally through our mailing list, please email Forum secretary Susan Weetman on aberdeenshirerecoveryforum@gmail.com.

New SMART Groups Launch in Aberdeenshire



Exciting new developments, supported by Aberdeenshire Community Recovery, with the launch of new SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) Recovery meetings being delivered across Aberdeenshire. These meetings build and expand our capacity to offer these fantastic opportunities for people either looking to start their recovery journey or continue with current recovery.

At the tail end of 2025, 10 community members completed the 2-day training organised by Aberdeenshire Community Recovery to learn about the SMART programme, the tools and to grow their own skills, personal development and confidence. This training will allow them to deliver SMART meetings in the local communities and areas where it has been identified they could benefit from a meeting.

The meetings all offer a safe and welcoming environment to learn and grow and explore a wider range of recovery tools. Through the shared experiences of others, we encourage, motivate and support each other at whatever stage we are at.

SMART provides training and tools for people who want to change their problematic behaviour, including addiction to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, food, shopping, Internet and others.

Guided by trained facilitators, participants come to help themselves and help each other using a variety of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and motivational tools and techniques.

Aberdeenshire Community Recovery are now supporting the delivery of SMART Recovery meetings in Inverurie, Banchory and Huntly and have supported the Stonehaven ADAPT meeting to continue but convert back to a SMART meeting. Also, the Stonehaven Community Support Hub which meets every Monday will now offer a monthly SMART to this meeting, sharing the knowledge and awareness of recovery in all aspects of life.

With the dedication and hard work from Aberdeenshire Community Recovery's experiential volunteers and support staff and funding from Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (via the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund), the community are now able to offer these fantastic meetings, with plans to offer this even wider still with a group in Laurencekirk in the pipeline.

Feedback from community “SMARTIES”

“it was great to able to chat and share my plans and remind myself the tools I have to continue my recovery, saying it out loud holds me accountable”

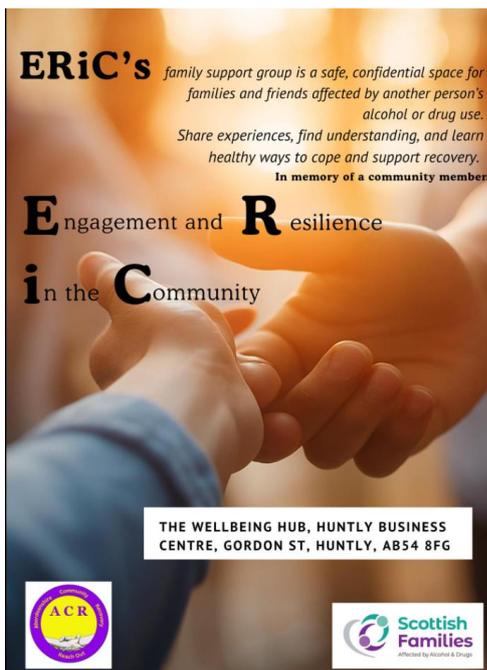
“Safe space to be able to speak my truth”

“I get loads from the SMART meeting, the facilitator keeps things on topic. The worksheets are really useful too and made me stop and think hard about my own personal triggers”

Where to find us:

- **SMART Inverurie:** Tesco Community Room, Commencing Thursday 19th Feb, fortnightly thereafter from 6.30 pm to 8 pm.
- **SMART Banchory:** West Church, High Street. Commencing Wednesday 4th March, fortnightly thereafter from 1 pm to 2.30 pm.
- **SMART Stonehaven:** Community Centre, Bath Street. Commencing Wednesday 18th Feb, fortnightly thereafter from 6.30 pm to 8 pm. With a monthly daytime meeting. Start date to be confirmed.
- **SMART Laurencekirk:** Coming Soon.

New and Old – Changes in Family Support Groups and Services



ERiC's family support group is a safe, confidential space for families and friends affected by another person's alcohol or drug use. Share experiences, find understanding, and learn healthy ways to cope and support recovery. In memory of a community member.

Engagement and **R**esilience
in the **C**ommunity

THE WELLBEING HUB, HUNTLY BUSINESS CENTRE, GORDON ST, HUNTLY, AB54 8FG

ACR
Scottish Families
Aberdeenshire Community Recovery

A new Family Support group has been set up by volunteers in Aberdeenshire: ERiC's Family Support Group – A New Space for Families.

ERiC's, Engagement and Resilience in the Community, grew from a shared wish to create a dedicated space for families. Volunteers recognised the need for regular opportunities for people affected by a loved one's alcohol or drug use to come together. The aim of ERiC's is to offer a welcoming, confidential and supportive environment where people can share experiences, listen to others and find encouragement and strength from those who understand.

The group was set up by Lindsey, a former teacher and now a volunteer with Aberdeenshire Community Recovery.

The group introduces the CRAFT (Community Resilience and Family Training) approach, a practical method that helps family members develop positive communication skills, set healthy boundaries and encourage healthier choices. Lindsey completed her CRAFT training through Aberdeenshire Community Recovery and can now support others to learn and use these helpful tools.

ERiC's meets fortnightly on Monday evenings at the Wellbeing Hub in Huntly Business Centre, and everyone is welcome.

Part of a Growing Network of Family Support

ERIC's complements older, well-established, peer-led family support groups in the Shire such as the Garioch Family Support Group (GFSG).

The Garioch Family Support Group meets fortnightly in Inverurie and provides confidential support for those who are concerned about a loved one's drug and/or alcohol use. In the group, people have the opportunity to share problems and get advice in a friendly, safe environment. The group is facilitated by two support workers who can organise speakers and provide information but much of the learning comes from the experience of group members themselves. People have spoken of how the group has helped develop their confidence and skills and encouraged them to identify coping strategies to safeguard their own mental health and well-being. There is also the reassurance that they are not alone which is very important.

This year has seen the involvement of three new people and a relaxation session which was enjoyed by all. If you would like to join them, please phone 07902 283177 for more information or email them at gariochfsg@yahoo.com. You would be made very welcome.

In terms of the support to keep the group running, GFSG have been fortunate in accessing funding from the Scottish Government through AVA Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Projects and have benefitted from the provision of banking facilities from Aberdeenshire Community Recovery. They are very grateful to both for helping to ensure that their much-needed service continues.

Changes to ADP Funded Family Support Services.

Meanwhile, ADP Funded Family Support Services in Aberdeenshire are undergoing change.

The Aberdeenshire Family Support Service has been provided by Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs since July 2019. Originally a single-worker model, funded by the Corra Foundation, the service moved to an annual grant-based funding model and, in recent years, has expanded to two workers in Aberdeenshire.

Last year, the ADP decided to recommission the Family Support Service, seeking funding for 2 persons to deliver support over a 2-year period. The aim of this recommissioned service is to:

- Maintain increased capacity and continuity for families
- Support the national Whole Family Approach and Family Inclusive Practice
- Ensure equity of access across Aberdeenshire's North, Central and South localities
- Retain experienced and trained staff
- Support ongoing monitoring, evaluation and improvement

ARE YOU STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH A LOVED ONE WHO HAS A DRUG OR ALCOHOL PROBLEM?

The Family Support Group can help by offering the chance to share your problems and get advice in a friendly, safe environment.

This small, informal group meets fortnightly on Wednesday evenings in Inverurie, and is open to anyone living in and around Aberdeenshire.

Our Facebook Page YouTube

For more information on the venue and dates, please call 07902 283177, or email gariochfsg@yahoo.com

Garioch Family Support Group Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults ACR

The new contract should commence from 1st April 2026. Based on the commissioning document issued in January of this year, the service should provide:

- One-to-one and group-based emotional and practical support for family members affected by alcohol and/or drug use
- Trauma-informed, rights-based and whole-family approaches
- Information, advocacy and navigation of wider service
- Practical support and advice on how best to support a family member's recovery whilst taking care of yourself
- Support to reduce isolation, improve wellbeing and build resilience
- Close partnership working with alcohol and drug recovery services, children's services and other local support.

We understand that, as a conclusion of the commissioning process, the service will transfer from Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD) to Alcohol and Drugs Action (ADA) on 1st April and that transition arrangements are being finalised.

Groups in the North

The long-established Bridge Recovery Cafe had a Christmas meal at the Spotty Bag Shop with an extended invite to all groups in Banff. 21 people attended.

After a period looking for alternative, affordable accommodation, the group restarted the cafe on the 13th February at the BB hall in Banff. The café is open from 4 pm to 6 pm on Fridays and is currently averaging 16 attendees.

There is also a men's group every second Friday from 2 pm until 4pm at Seafield House in Banff.

We are aware that a number of other groups are active in the North of Aberdeenshire but have been unable to establish contact details at the time of publication.

Job Club in Huntly

Aberdeenshire Wellbeing Hub, hosts the new 'Community Job Club' for Huntly and the surrounding area.



Huntly Community Job Club
Every 2nd Thursday, 1 pm to 3 pm
Starting Thursday 12th March
Aberdeenshire Wellbeing Hub
The Business Centre, Huntly

Come to this first session and tell us what you would like to see happen in the job club, such as:

- Find out about job opportunities
- Learn the skills to help you get a job
- Find out about local employment support

A partnership project delivered through the Marr Local Learning Community Partnership



Aberdeenshire Wellbeing Hub, The Business Centre
Gordon Street, Huntly, AB54 8FG

For more information
Email: ed.garrett2@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Changing lives and supporting individuals, families and communities through learning in Aberdeenshire

The core planning group consists of representatives from Community Learning and Development, Barnardo's, Gordon Rural Action and Aberdeenshire Community Recovery.

The group is part of the Marr Local Learning Community Partnership in Huntly, which is a collaborative group of organisations and volunteers focused on improving community learning, development, and wellbeing of people locally.

With several people within the community of Huntly and representatives from various organisations, the Community Job Club has now got a robust, co-produced and community-led plan to work from.

Our first session brought together community members with advisors from Skills Development Scotland, Department of Work and Pensions, Enable Works and Community Learning and Development.

Next session is on: Thursday 26th of March at 1pm. There will be a presentation from Enable Works that day.

Focus on Women – Banchory Women's Group Podcast

Banchory Women's Group will be the topic of Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum's new podcast series.

In the next few weeks, Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum will be launching a series of podcasts where community members discuss themes and issues related to recovery and the supports we value. In the first of the series, series producer Jill Dow meets with members of the Banchory Women's Group to discuss the importance of dedicated Women's Groups in supporting recovery.

Conversation ranges across why we think women only and men only groups are vital, women's view on radio presenters and whether it is appropriate to be talking about women's health and everyday topics (like talking about their kids) in these spaces. The podcast also explores how Men's Sheds started in Australia, and how the UK versions compare to the Aussie ones. Participants also discuss why they started the Banchory Women's Group and how it is going to grow.

Podcast episodes will be available through Aberdeenshire Recovery Forums facebook page www.facebook.com/aberdeenshirerecoveryforum

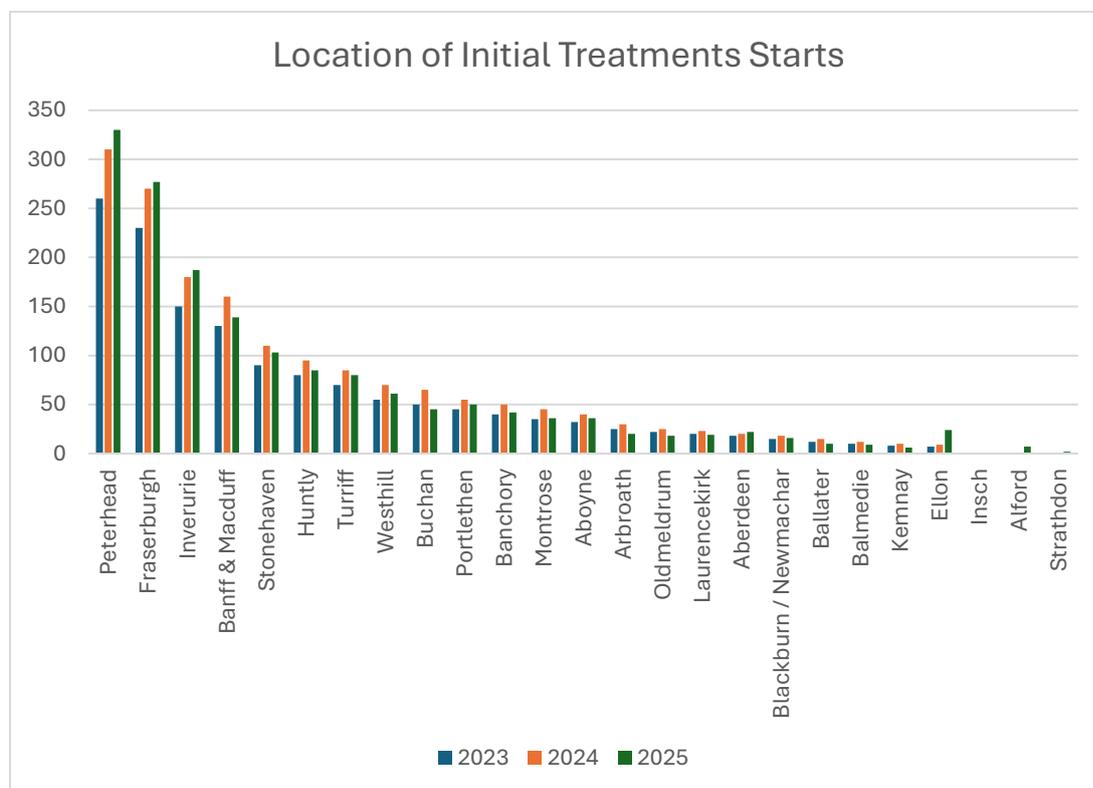
Drug and Alcohol Services - Increased Access to Rehab and Signs of Wider Access to Support

Encouraging increase in referral rates from areas previously under-represented.

The number of referrals for treatment handled by the various drug and alcohol services in Aberdeenshire in 2025 was approximately the same as in the preceding year. According to the figures provided by the Health and Social Care Partnership, 1654 referrals were received up until the end of December 2025, compared to 1745 and 1438 in the preceding 2 years.

The number of referrals does not, obviously, relate to the quality of treatment and some of the small reduction may be related to the closure of older cases.

Locations with Step-In Centres continue to dominate the pattern of referrals across Aberdeenshire but the figures released for October to December show an encouraging up-kick in referrals from postcodes such as Alford which have had very low referral rates historically.

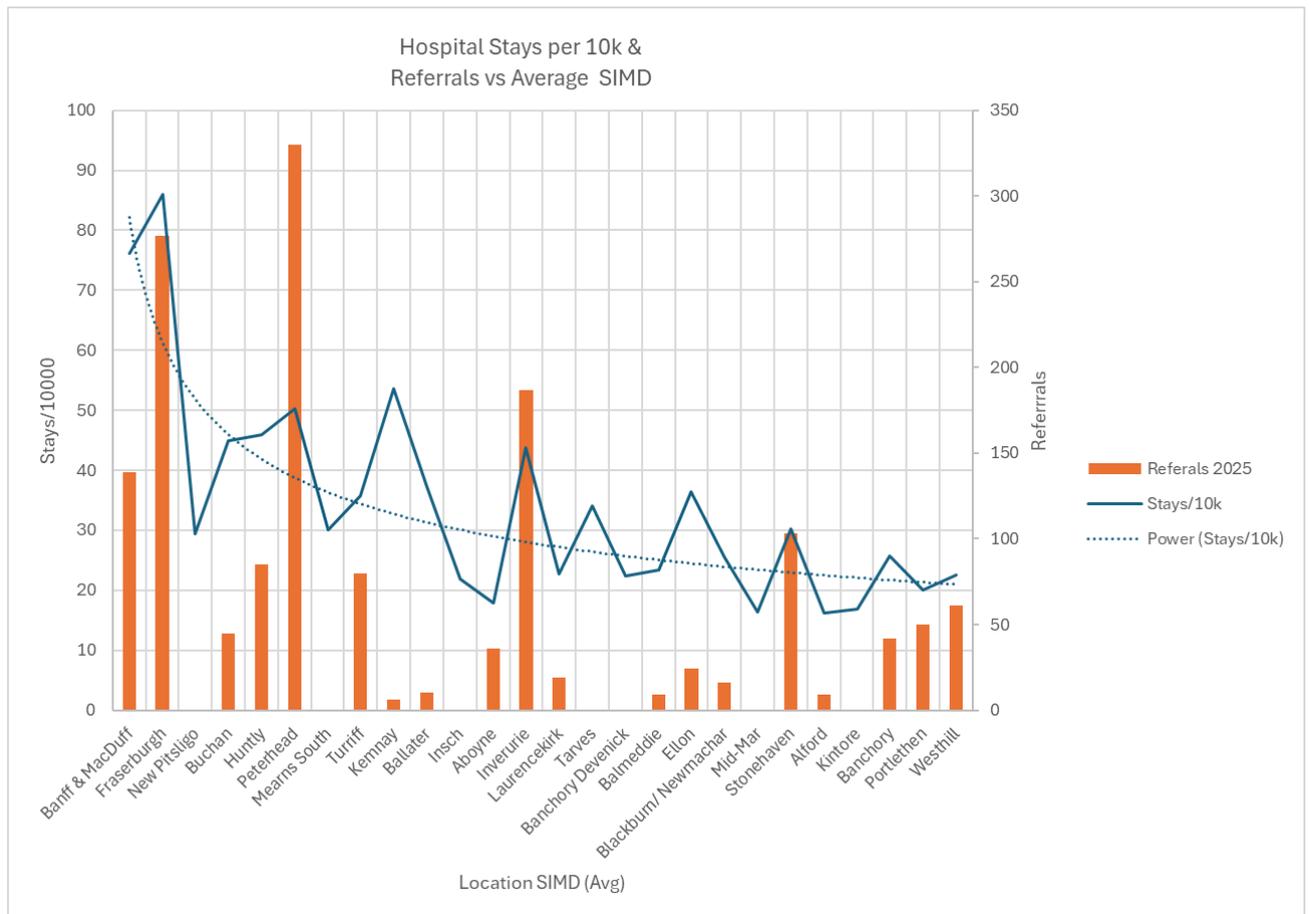


Drug and Alcohol Services now have Step-In premises established in:

- Banff at Seafield House
- Inverurie at Lumphart Cottage
- Peterhead at 88 King Street
- Fraserburgh at the Faithlie Centre.

The Step-in Centre at Stonehaven, Viewmount, is not open to the public yet; however, there is a phone number and email address for arrangements to be made to see people at an appropriate venue.

It is said, anecdotally, that accessibility of treatment is influenced by rural remoteness and the openness of local GP practices to substance use referrals and treatment. Aberdeenshire’s support model has tended to focus Step-In support in areas of high levels of deprivation such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Comparing the pattern of treatment referrals in 2025 with hospital visits related to drugs and alcohol in the last available set of data on locality deprivation in Aberdeenshire, the impacts of the Step-In Centres can be clearly seen.



It is unclear whether a recent needs assessment around Drug and Alcohol issues in Aberdeenshire exists. Public Health Scotland have stated that they are unaware of such a document. In the absence of publicly available evidence of needs, it is difficult to know what drives this varied pattern of referrals and treatment starts. The increase in referrals from previously unrecorded areas is, however, encouraging some hope that a wider engagement through community health centres and outreach may be addressing some of the gaps in access to support in rural areas.

No further Information Available on Suspected Drug and Alcohol Related Deaths

Police Scotland have not yet published the Drug Related Death figures for Aberdeenshire for October to December 2025 so it remains unclear how new drugs entering the market are influencing the Aberdeenshire community specifically in this regard although, according to RADAR (Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response), Police Scotland North East reported 29 suspected drug deaths in the period September to November 2025.

The Scottish RADAR report for the last available quarter (to November 2025) concluded that:

- Contamination of drugs with toxic substances is both common and widespread. There is an urgent need for accessible drug checking services across the country.
- Almost half of Scottish samples analysed did not solely contain the intended purchase. A new depressant drug, medetomidine, was detected in samples submitted as diazepam.
- The majority of harms involved the use of more than one substance. The average number of controlled drugs detected per sample was between 5 and 6.
- Among people who had an assessment for specialist drug treatment, powder cocaine was the most commonly reported main drug.
- Clonazepam was the most commonly detected street benzo while detections of the new benzodiazepine, ethylbromazepam, continued to increase.
- In the most recent quarter, there were 9 RADAR trend reports related to the use of temazepam 'jellies' or 'eggs' (up from zero in previous quarters).

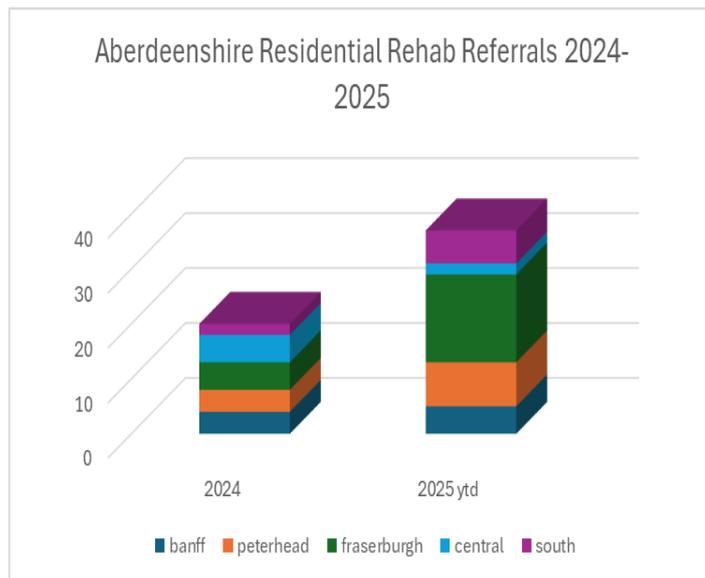
[About this release - Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response \(RADAR\) quarterly report - January 2026 - Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response \(RADAR\) quarterly report - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

In response to Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum's Freedom of Information requests, the Aberdeenshire HSCP (Health and Social Care Partnership) has informed us that "Whilst there is a process to be notified of all suspected Drug Related Deaths there is not the same nationally for alcohol specific deaths so this data is not available."

The newly published Scottish Government Alcohol and Drug Strategy gives equal emphasis to alcohol specific deaths alongside drug related deaths so that, as time progresses, a clearer picture should emerge to help in the improvement of services.

Access to Rehab for Aberdeenshire Community has Doubled since 2024!

During 2025, 37 people accessed residential rehab facilities funded by the Scottish Government or local funds. This is almost double the number who have been able to access treatment compared to the previous year. We also understand that a number of individuals from Aberdeenshire have been able to access treatment in the new Rae House facility located in near Alford.



Safer in Service

Aberdeenshire ADP continues to support “Safer in Service” Days of Action, also known as Operation Protector. This is a partnership approach to address and reduce the harms of drugs and alcohol use and prevent drug and alcohol related deaths in the communities of Aberdeenshire. The days are held mainly in Fraserburgh and Peterhead as evidence highlights these areas experiencing more harms.

The days of action provide:

- Outreach
- Community Engagement / Drop-in
- Community Safety Officers

At the end of 2025, the ADP was reviewing having quarterly events to support those most at risk but also engaging with the wider community to increase knowledge and understanding, tackle stigma, advertise support available and provide a wider partnership approach.

Rae House Celebrates First Year

Rae House is a residential rehabilitation service dedicated to supporting individuals who wish to achieve abstinence-based recovery. Since welcoming our first residents in January 2025, we have supported approximately 90 people on their journey to improved health and wellbeing. We are currently fully funded by the Scottish Government until March 2027, allowing us to remove traditional barriers to treatment and ensure fair, equitable access for those seeking support.



Our service is compassionate, person-centred, and firmly focused on empowering residents. We help individuals to address their substance use, enhance their mental health, and nurture their overall wellbeing within a safe, caring, and structured environment.

Situated in the picturesque Aberdeenshire countryside near the rural village of Alford, Rae House offers a peaceful, drug and alcohol free setting that promotes personal growth and recovery. Residents benefit from tailored care plans, structured therapeutic support, and a variety of wellbeing activities designed to meet individual needs. Our programme typically lasts six months but can be adapted based on personal circumstances.



The facility accommodates up to 27 residents within a holistic, evidence-based Therapeutic Community model. This approach creates a supportive and structured environment focused on improving health, wellbeing, and personal responsibility. All residents are known as Community Members and play an essential role in contributing to the collective wellbeing of the Therapeutic Community. Community Members are encouraged to take an active role in their

own recovery, as well as in supporting one another. Through peer support, group therapy, and a range of therapeutic and wellbeing activities, individuals develop skills, confidence, and resilience within a collaborative setting.

*“this program saved my life, I would recommend to anyone who is struggling”
– Previous resident of Rae House*

In our first year, we have continued to grow, learn, and strengthen the quality of the support we provide. Our Recovery Through Nature programme has developed significantly, with regular involvement in conservation projects including work with the Glen Tanar Estate. These opportunities help residents gain practical skills, build confidence, and experience personal growth whilst giving back to the local community. Residents have also had the opportunity to participate in regular hill walks, camping trips and have now completed several hills in the Cairngorms.

*“I felt a sense of achievement, I don’t know the last time I really achieved something”
– a resident on reaching the summit of a hill*



The service was officially opened by First Minister John Swinney in March 2025. Since then, we have continued to build strong partnerships with local organisations and specialist services to ensure Community Members have access to comprehensive health and wellbeing support within the local area.

If you would like any further information about the service or the referral process, please contact rae.house@phoenixfutures.org.uk

Scottish Government Publish New Drug & Alcohol Strategy



For many of us, just getting through the day and staying on track with our Recovery is enough to declare each day a success. Sometimes, the simple detail of supporting and being supported in Recovery is enough.

The bigger picture of how governments support the Recovery community and how their support gets filtered through local government and other services can seem remote.

A NEW Alcohol and Drugs Strategic Plan was published on 10th March: *Preventing Harm, Promoting Recovery: Scotland's Alcohol & Drugs Strategic Plan 2026 - 2035*

In conjunction with a new *National Specification for Alcohol and Drug Services*, the document lays out the Scottish Government's intended approach to tackling the diverse harms associated with problem substance use.

The core aims of this Alcohol & Drugs Strategic Plan are stated as to *prevent harm, promote recovery and save lives*.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/preventing-harm-promoting-recovery-scotlands-alcohol-drugs-strategic-plan-2026-2035/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-specification-alcohol-drugs-services/>

These objectives are wrapped around with expectation the services and communities work in Partnership and the new National Charter on Human Rights for people affected by substances is implemented.

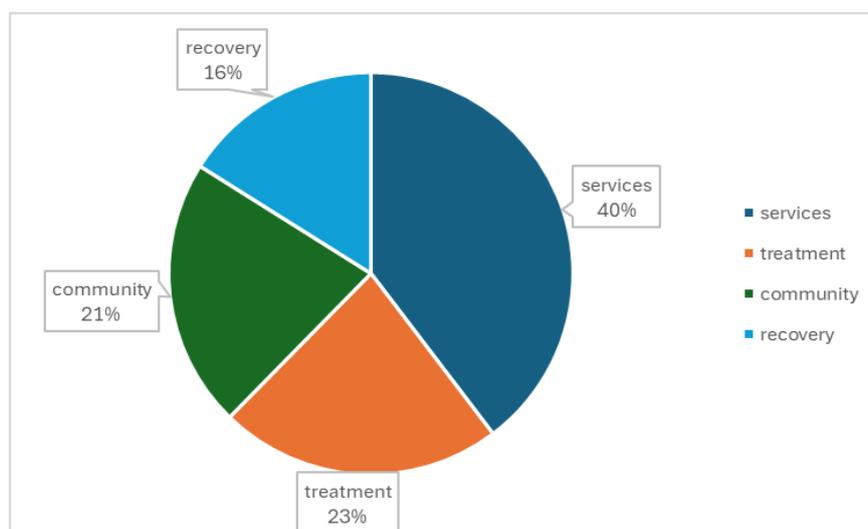
The plan states that “A fundamental priority is ensuring that people are empowered to express their needs, make informed choices and have agency and control over the support they receive. People with lived and living experience of alcohol and drug harms offer first hand insights into the complexities of substance use and the type of support required to prevent harms and promote



recovery. Their participation in the design, delivery and monitoring of services is crucial.”

It goes on to say that “A resilient and sustainable voluntary sector is vital to the successful delivery of this Plan... Volunteers who willingly contribute their time, skills and lived experience form a substantial yet often unseen backbone of Scotland’s recovery ecosystem. Volunteers can be the first trusted point of contact for people who feel excluded from services, providing continuity, safety and relational support. With the expertise and compassion of volunteers, local communities and organisations are the experts at knowing what works for their area and are able to help create targeted support mechanisms for those that need it.”

Although promoting recovery is stated as one of the key aims, however, the document itself relegates Recovery Communities to being part of **Wider communities of care**, implying that peer support is less than central to the strategy. As a test, we could look at the different frequency of use of terminology in the document as illustrated below.



The primary elements of Recovery Community support outlines in the new Strategy encompass:

Advocacy: Advocacy services provide information, support, and representation. Local areas are expected to ensure that everyone is aware of their right to independent advocacy and provide contacts for relevant services who are able to provide this.

Recovery communities and mutual aid: Treatment and sustained recovery is enhanced by engagement with recovery communities and mutual aid. Local systems are expected to make and maintain connections with local recovery communities, fellowships and mutual aid groups, allowing individuals to access ongoing peer-led support throughout their recovery. Peer-led groups can be independent or associated with recognised recovery models like 12 Step and SMART. People should be supported to find the model which works best for them.

Peer support throughout all phases of treatment and recovery journey: Access to peer support is expected to also form part of any formal treatment and support pathways put in place as part of an individual care plan. Visibility of peers can facilitate initial engagement with services and support ongoing engagement with treatment and recovery.

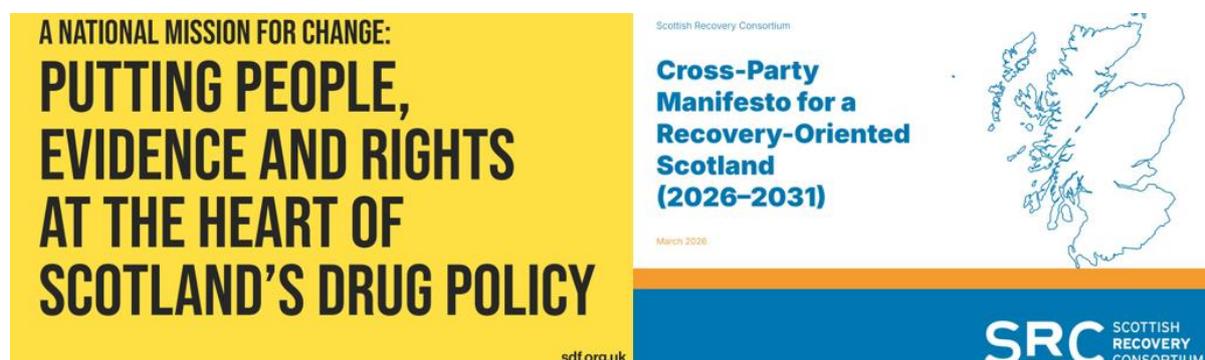
Social networks: Building more positive relationships with family, friends and community is a common goal of recovery and positive social networks can support changing drug and alcohol use and other positive behaviour change including building resilience.

Community Representatives from Aberdeenshire were involved in a Scottish Recovery Consortium sponsored review by Lived Experience Recovery Organisations (LERO) of draft proposals for the new Strategy and have helped shape Scottish Recovery Consortium's collective response to the document. The LERO consensus was that the wording of the strategy was still very Treatment and Services oriented rather than Recovery Oriented and community-led. This view is reflected in the formal feedback submitted to Government by Tracey McFall, Scottish Recovery Consortium's Chief Executive Officer, on behalf of the wider recovery community.

Preventing Harm, Promoting Recovery supersedes the previous strategy - *Rights, Respect & Recovery* (2018). The shift in emphasis might suggest that issues of Stigma and Accessibility have been resolved in the wider Aberdeenshire context. As Tracey McFall has commented, 'There is still a way to go, but we'll keep engaging with SG to ensure we're involved in the implementation plan and that we keep recovery central to Scotland's approach'.

National Third Sector Organisations Publish their Manifestos

Community members also get the opportunity to elect a new Scottish Government in May. All the parties – SNP, Scottish Labour, Lib-Dems, Greens, Reform, Conservatives – have different takes on substance use issues and the best way to address them...but each of them wants you vote.



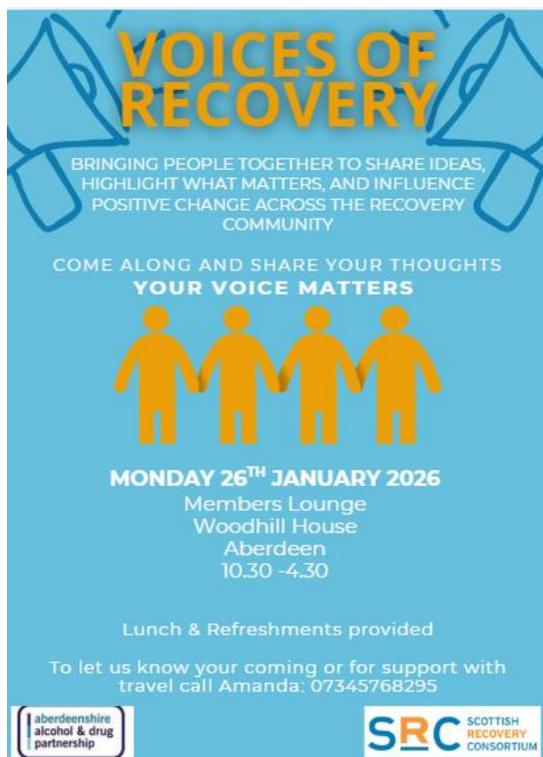
The Scottish Recovery Consortium and the Scottish Drugs Forum have both developed manifestos articulating their take on what parties should be supporting to reduce substance use harms and promote wellbeing and recovery. The manifestos are accessible using the links below.

Let's make the Aberdeenshire candidates aware of what we want and need either using the manifestos or directly.

Scottish Drugs Forum Manifesto - [Manifesto - Scottish Drugs Forum](#)

Scottish Recovery Consortium Manifesto [Launching Our Vision: A Cross-Party Manifesto for a Recovery-Oriented Scotland \(2026-2031\) – Scottish Recovery Consortium](#)

Voices of Recovery – Is someone listening?



The Scottish Recovery Consortium facilitated *Voices of Recovery* - a community engagement – at Woodhill House on 26th January. Around 30 community representatives attended from across Aberdeenshire, including representatives reflecting views on recovery from within Peterhead Prison. The aim of the event was to gather the views, priorities, and experiences of people with lived and living experience of recovery, their families and peers.

The Scottish Recovery Consortium team focussed on the assets available to support Recovery in Aberdeenshire and the barriers to developing strong recovery networks. There was lively debate and strong views from those in the room with lived and living experience of recovery in Aberdeenshire.

Key Findings

The Scottish Recovery Consortium have now provided feedback from the day. They highlight that participants consistently emphasised several recurring issues:

1. People highlighted the need for meaningful lived experience in decision-making, service design, peer support and ADP governance.
2. There is a lack of clear, accessible, and up-to-date information about available services, pathways, rights and supports.
3. Locally delivered services are essential in the context of lack of bus services, affordability barriers, poor links between the Shire and the city.
4. Sustained, adequate, and flexible funding is needed for peer-led organisations, LEROs, community groups, and trauma-informed spaces.
5. Fragmentation across services, inconsistent staffing, unclear referral pathways, and gaps in throughcare (prisons, rehabilitation facilities, community transitions) were raised as issues.
6. Folk emphasised the need for respect, dignity, confidentiality, and understanding across all systems and services.
7. Need for clearer evidence base and data to inform strategy, service planning, and prevention was highlighted.
8. There are gaps and opportunities to link pathways, communities, and recovery networks at critical transition points.

9. There is a lack of access to trauma therapy, counselling, mental health support, crisis response, and preventive interventions.

10. The group recognised Aberdeenshire’s strengths, peer skills, volunteering culture, events, and training opportunities, but emphasised the need for further training for LEROs, advocacy capacity, life skills development, and employment pathways.

What Next?

In compiling their report and feedback, Scottish Recovery Consortium executed the first two steps – Facts and Analysis – of the FAIR model recommended by Scottish Government. It remains for the ADP and the wider Recovery Community to build on this event and specifically to:

- Co-produce the remaining FAIR stages – Identification of Shared Responsibilities and Review of Progress
- Hold a follow-up engagement session
- Strengthen communication and visibility
- Begin joint work on priority topics
- Review accessibility and participation barriers
- Share the report

Kathryn Flavell, the independent Chair of the Aberdeenshire ADP thanked the participants for their contribution and said the input would be invaluable to their strategy development and planning in the coming months. Given recent changes announced 2 days later to the mechanisms through which the community are allowed to engage with the ADP, how the Recovery Community can engage in the Co-Production process remains unclear.

Introduction of LLE Panels in Aberdeenshire and a New Partnership Delivery Framework

ADP are looking for panellists to for regular consultation

Aberdeenshire ADP are looking for people with Lived and Living Experience and their families to take part in Panels.

The Panels are intended to provide community members with the opportunity to use their knowledge and personal insight to help improve local drug and alcohol services and influence how policies and pathways are developed.

The role offers panellists training, support and digital access plus reimbursement of £13.45 per hour in order to:

- Share what works well in services and what could feel better for people using them.
- Comment on new ideas, guidance, consultations and service materials.
- Discuss real barriers people face, including stigma, inequalities, and access to support.
- Help shape more compassionate, trauma-informed and accessible services.

We understand that the ADP team are proposing 2 separate panels – one for the North and another for Central and South. Expressions of interest in participating in the ADP Panels can be sent to amanda.stephen@aberdeenshire.gov.uk until 27th March. Further details of the Panels and what s involved can be found following this link:

<https://myjobscotland.gov.uk/councils/aberdeenshire-council/jobs/adp-lived-experience-panel-member-463169>

This Panel announcement follows abrupt closure of the ADP LLE Sub-group

Announcement of the Panels comes after the ADP Support team announced another abrupt change in the way local communities are able to influence and learn about decisions which affect them and their families.

On 28th January, a few days after the ADP sponsored *Voices of Recovery* event, the ADP Support team unexpectedly announced that “To ensure that the ADP is operating in an inclusive and trauma informed way, we have made the decision to stop the LLE Subgroup to allow for a review. This does not stop participation as our Experiential Lead is committed to involving, empowering and engaging people with direct lived and living experience of their own or someone else's substance use.”

This statement was issued on Aberdeenshire Public Health facebook pages in the North and South and an email was sent, without prior consultation, to existing members of the ADP’s LLE Sub-group.

Given that the LLE-Subgroup was a fundamental component of ADP Structure, this development reflects a further level of turmoil and uncertainty around how and whether community voices can influence decisions about drug and alcohol services.

Jean Henretty, who was a member of the LLE Sub-group up until 28th January, agreed that change was required, writing that “the present sub-group format was not reaching the lived and living experience community and being online during the day was excluding many people. Going by the Government’s standards of community engagement the group was not achieving any of the 7 standards.”

Scottish Government publish new ADP Partnership Delivery Framework

Partnership Delivery Framework: Alcohol and Drugs (2026)



It is ironic that the Aberdeenshire ADP has implemented this change just as the Scottish Government has issued a new Partnership Delivery Framework for ADPs which re-emphasises the need for direct LLE involvement in ADP decision-making and the key role of the ADP Chair in ‘championing LLE involvement’.

The new delivery framework should be implemented with immediate effect. It sets out the shared expectations for how the alcohol and drugs system operates. It provides clarity on roles, responsibilities and ways of working across national and local partners.

The framework states that direction for the participation of people with LLE is set through national policy, guidance, and commissioning expectations. Decisions about how involvement is realised should be taken within the governance arrangements of national

programmes, ADPs, and individual organisations.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/partnership-delivery-framework-alcohol-drugs-2026/>

Meaningful and well-supported LLE involvement is the accountability of Ministers, senior officials, ADP Chairs, Chief Officers, and service leaders, who should ensure the structures, resources, and cultures are in place to enable real influence in decision making.

Crucially, Lived and Living Experience is expected to be part of the ‘minimum cohort’ of an ADP Forum – alongside the Integration Joint Board, the Council, the Health Board, Police Scotland and the Third Sector. It is an explicit responsibility of the ADP Chair to ‘*champion[ing] LLE, embedding rights-based and trauma-informed approaches – as provided for in the Charter of Rights for People Affected by Substance Use – in service design and decision-making.*’

With the unexpected closure of the LLE Sub-group and a shift to panels which are not represented in the ADP Forum directly, how LLE is represented as part of that mandatory ADP cohort in the months ahead remains very uncertain. This represents a real opportunity to establish meaningful, equitable engagement with other partners in a context in which, according to the new Framework, ‘*there should be no senior or superior member, either individual or institutional, within the ADP, with all partners bringing relevant value, experience, and expertise, as well as several accountabilities, to ensure balanced, holistic, and considered discussion and outcomes.*’

Get Involved

Send us your news We welcome good news stories and updates from peer groups to share. Let's CHIME!

- CONNECT with each other
- Give each other HOPE
- Find and love your IDENTITY
- be MINDFUL of yourself and others
- Be EMPOWERED, take control of your destiny

Please forward any suggestions for content to john@acr.scot. We also welcome citizen journalists to get involved, sharing their insights into Recovery, its triumphs and challenges in the region. Check out the peer-edited Buzz magazine recently launched for inspiration and ideas.

Acknowledgements

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Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum Communications Sub-Group