

Keeping The Promise

to our children,
young people
and families

Update on progress 2024



**#Keep
The
Promise**

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young people
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In March 2022 the Scottish Government published its Promise Implementation Plan. This set out in detail the work that the Scottish Government will lead to keep The Promise we have made to our children, young people and families with care experience. Two years on, this update provides a status report on progress so far.

This update complements and directly informs the work undertaken by The Promise Scotland to set the strategic direction for the next six years in the Plan 24-30, which was published in June 2024.

The Scottish Government remains fully committed to delivering on our pledge to people with care experience in Scotland by accepting and responding to the conclusions of the Independent Care Review set out in **The Promise**.

Keeping The Promise means we need to take immediate action to improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people, adults and their families who are currently in or on the edge of care; young people who are moving on from children's care services; and action over the longer term to improve the level of support for families from birth through to adulthood to significantly reduce the numbers of families coming into the care system.

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Ministerial Foreword by the First Minister and the Minister For Children, Young People and The Promise



John Swinney
First Minister

First Minister

As the First Minister for Scotland my commitment to The Promise is as strong today as it was in 2020 when all recommendations set out by the Independent Care Review were accepted in full.

In March 2022, the Scottish Government published our Keeping The Promise Implementation Plan. Building on the structure of The Promise itself and the results of the Independent Care Review, the plan set out for the first time the actions and commitments that the Scottish Government will take to lead Scotland to keep The Promise. At the heart of all of these actions is the ambition that all children in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected.

I had the privilege of writing the foreword to that Plan in my role as Deputy First Minister, and I am privileged once more to introduce the work that has been done so far.

A lot has happened since 2022. As a country we have continued to move forward from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, progressing in our journey of recovery from the effect it had on so many aspects of our lives. And yet we have met new challenges through the cost of living crisis and at a global level the atrocities in the Ukraine and in Gaza.

And in that time we as a Government have continued in our resolve to keep The Promise. This commitment to change supports the Scottish Government's four priorities and is firmly rooted in our aim to eradicate child poverty and improve public services. The Promise is anti-poverty, and success will be built from our approach to pro-growth, fairness and focussed delivery of high quality public services.

The excellent work carried out in the past year by my predecessor and by the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise has confirmed this commitment to change. It is my aim to carry on that good work across Cabinet to strengthen the cross-portfolio oversight of the actions and commitments that we must undertake.

I am resolute that we have moved forward in our drive towards keeping The Promise and remain confident that we will deliver it together by 2030. This year's Programme for Government confirms our commitment to introduce additional local flexibility in how existing budgets and services can be reconfigured in the pursuit of a whole family approach. We will drive progress through our continued multi-year approach to Whole Family Wellbeing; support services from prebirth through to adult; improvements in our education and justice response; and packages of support for our young people transitioning from the children's care service.

Progress that also recognises that the experience of being in care is lifelong, and that we must continue to ensure that the targeted and universal supports available recognise the impact on lives.

Keeping The Promise is not, and should never be, a political bargaining point. We are collective in our ambition, and we are collective in our action to change. This is a place for unity across the Parliament, across partners and across the country to deliver, together, the change required by us all.

We must continue to work together and we must continue to push harder. This is a huge undertaking and requires connection across systems, across services, and across organisations. No one person will guarantee our success, we all have parts to play and I thank you all for the dedication you have shown and that you continue to demonstrate.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge and thank the hard work and devotion across our workforce. The case for prevention over reaction is not a new one, but I know it is a difficult one in the context of delivering services on a daily basis. Your work across Scotland is recognised, appreciated and admired.

Thank you also to the care experienced community. We must, and we will, continue to engage with you to ensure that you remain at the heart of work underway. Your experience is crucial in helping to deliver the right change in the right way. Importantly we must improve how we demonstrate this change to ensure that it is seen, and it is felt by the children, young people, families and adults to whom it matters.

In presenting this update on progress by The Scottish Government it is in complement to the work led by Fiona Duncan to develop Plan 24-30. I would like to thank Fiona for this forward plan which, founded in realistic delivery, sets out not just what should happen next, but a clear and comprehensive route map on how it can happen.

The Promise sets out so clearly the case why if we think, act, and invest differently, the outcomes can be so improved. While we may be proud of our collective achievements across Scotland, we must also be very clear that our focus and pace must be sustained, and in some areas it must be improved. We know that there are areas where particular attention is required and I do not shy away from that fact.

The Scottish Government must lead from the front and you have that commitment from me and from my Cabinet and Ministerial team. Let me thank you all for sharing your continued commitment to do all we can, the very best we can, to make change happen and to keep love central in our ambition to improve lives.



Natalie Don-Innes

Minister for Children, Young People
and The Promise

Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

The role of Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise is a role that I feel truly honoured to hold. A role that I am personally invested in and that is rooted in my heart.

Since I came into post in April 2023, I have had the pleasure of visiting a wide range of projects and seeing many excellent examples of how change is having a positive impact on the lives of our children and families. Improvements that will ensure that for any child or young person who is engaged with care services they feel loved, valued and supported.

I have also had the honour of meeting a number of different children and young people who have been open and honest about their experiences and what further action we need to take. I am thankful to each and every person who has taken the time to speak with me and I value the insight and perspective your sharing has given me.

I've heard how important targeted support at the right time can be, and the impact that knowing there is scaffolding around you can have, helping you to stay steady in times of uncertainty. I've heard about the difference that solid and stable connections can make to outcomes and the difficulties that are faced when those connections break down.

Our focus on supporting families on the edge of care, backed by our commitment to Whole Family Wellbeing, is allowing us to see in action how the right guidance and help can benefit families, change outcomes and avoid crisis point.

We must continue this great work across Scotland but we must improve how we learn from each other and spread the impact of our work to ensure that the good practice that is happening can become common practice, and be replicated, where appropriate, across all of Scotland. To help achieve this we must continue to increase public awareness and understanding of what care experience means and what The Promise means. We must drive out stigma and increase voice.

It is only by increasing this understanding that we will be able to carry the support and understanding required to achieve our shared goals to sustainably change lives, both now and of future generations.

In presenting this update from The Scottish Government I am encouraged by the progress against the actions and commitments that is being made. Progress that includes the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster carers which has benefitted over 9,000 families; the commitment made to a £2,000 Care Leaver Payment; the introduction of the Bairns' Hoose Pathfinders and the Childrens Care & Justice Act; the support to adults with care experience through our roll out of trauma informed training; and our wider policy supports including through further education and employment.

We must continue to work together to push the pace and drive the focus of our actions. I believe that it is crucial that we can demonstrate and explain the positive change that our investment, resource and focus is making. The Promise Progress Framework, developed jointly with COSLA and The Promise Scotland will help us to do this and enable us to identify where things aren't working and more support is needed.

With six years to go I am confident that the Promise can and will be kept, given the progress we have made already, the way we are currently setting the foundations now for more preventative actions, and the will and ambition of all of those who are working towards change. To get us there I welcome the work undertaken by Fiona Duncan to develop Plan 24-30 and to clearly set out the next steps required in a delivery focussed route for action.

Thank you all for your continued commitment to change and most of all thank you to the children, young people, adults and families for your continued direction and support as we strive together to bring the improvements that my Ministerial position gives me the privilege to lead.

Cabinet Sub-Committee on The Promise

The Cabinet Sub-Committee on The Promise first met in October 2023. Its purpose is to explore progress on keeping The Promise and decision making on key issues during the life of the programme. It provides the opportunity to; direct and support Scotland's commitment to keep The Promise; recognise the cross-portfolio commitments and interdependencies; provide a route for prioritisation, influence and challenging decision making to introduce the change required to improve the outcomes for children, young people, adults and families with care experience.

The Cabinet Sub-Committee aims to meet 4 times per year.

Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise

Following the conclusion of the Independent Care Review, Fiona Duncan was appointed by Scottish Ministers to continue to set the strategic direction and culture to ensure the conclusions are fully realised by 2030.

The role of Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise provides continuity in the leadership and the development of The Promise. The role of Independent Strategic Advisor and Chair of The Promise Scotland include direction to:

- Maintain and develop strategic relationships with key organisations to drive change consistent with realising the vision of the Independent Care Review
- Establish and oversee the required governance and accountability structures of The Promise Scotland
- Ensure an independent and impartial secretariat function is provided to The Oversight Board to enable that group to effectively discharge its role of holding Scotland to account for keeping The Promise

In this role Ms Duncan ultimately reports to the First Minister and regularly meets with the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise and the First Minister to provide an update on progress and agree forward priorities for action.

Plan 24-30

In recognising there is a lot of positive work underway that is making a difference to the lives of children and families and this must be celebrated and built on, significant efforts are required to ensure that Scotland does keep The Promise by 2030.

To help achieve this, there is a recognised need for a single, shared route map in place across all organisations that have a role to play. The route map must make clear where responsibility lies for all aspects of Scotland's 'care system', including but not limited to, its legislation, decision making, investment, culture and service delivery. Plan 24-30 maps the milestones, timelines, roles and responsibilities required to keep The Promise, including a mid-point review of progress.

Ultimately, the route map must show how organisations across Scotland will meet the responsibility they have to children and families. It must also be dynamic and able to flex and change as the world changes, making sure the focus stays on doing what is needed to make the changes demanded.

This task is being led by the Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise and will lay out 'HOW' Scotland will do this, and by 'WHO'.

Plan 24-30 was be launched in June 2024.





Part 1

Progress on our Journey to Change

We are determined to drive forward the transformational change that is required to keep The Promise and make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up, where all children are loved, safe, respected and realise their full potential.

The Independent Care Review told Scotland what needs to change in order to improve the lives and experiences of our children, young people, adults and families with care experience. Progress is being made both at a national and a local level and the continued commitment across Scottish Government and all stakeholders is driving forward change in a way that many similar reviews have not succeeded to do.

In identifying what needs to change, The Promise does however stop short of stating how to make the change required. In response, in March 2022 the Scottish Government set out its strategic intent through a comprehensive Promise Implementation Plan. This plan presents a broad range of actions and commitments that we will take by 2030 and it details how we must lead from the front through policy, delivery and investment. An approach that requires a combination of targeted person centred support, place based activity and universal service provision.

This strength of commitment to deliver change is unwavering. It carries the priority of the First Minister and is directly demonstrated in the appointment, in April 2023, of a dedicated Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, Natalie Don-Innes; and in autumn 2023 the establishment of a dedicated Cabinet Sub-Committee on The Promise.

In June 2024, Fiona Duncan, Scotland's Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise, published Plan 24-30. In setting the route for the next six years this builds on what has already happened and ensure a continuity in the actions we must all take as a nation. It provides a single shared plan that meets the needs and aspirations of the care community, children, and families, and give confidence it is entirely deliverable. In so doing it sets a common understanding of how change will be measured and the milestones to make it possible to keep track of Scotland's progress against delivery.

This update document from The Scottish Government provides review of the actions and commitments that we have said we will deliver. It complements and informs Plan 24-30 and points forward to the actions that will continue to be pushed and prioritised nationally to help deliver the change that keeping The Promise demands.



Realising Our Vision For Change

By 2030 we will have reduced the number of children in care and those in care will report a positive care experience

The vision for the future is clear. By 2030 we will have reduced the number of children in care and those in care will report a positive care experience. To get there we must continue to build the network of whole family support to help keep more families together, and we must focus our actions to reduce the number of children and young people who cannot safely be cared for at home, including those on compulsory measures of supervision.

For the children and young people who are in care, they will have a good loving childhood surrounded by compassion and consistency.

This will require a consistency of approach, values and understanding across Scotland's workforce in order to ensure the right support is available for those who need, and those who provide care. Achieving this will mean that every family that needs support gets the right support at the right time, from pre-birth, and that by working together, we fulfil children's rights to be raised safely in their own families.

Success will also require us to shift the balance of our spend from chronic intervention to prevention. Meaning that families that need help get it early, before crisis point. Ultimately this will see a reduction in care experienced related poor outcomes including poverty, homelessness, substance misuse, poor health including mental health, vaccine-preventable infectious diseases, offending, school exclusion, educational attainment, and low employability.

The Public Protection system is an important part of delivering this vision. 'Public Protection' is a term used to describe the many different approaches used to prevent harm to the public, and can include child protection, adult support and protection, offender management, violence against women and girls, support for problematic

use of alcohol and drugs, and suicide prevention. It requires to be understood as part of a continuum of services and support which spans prevention and early intervention, through to action which addresses high levels of risk or wellbeing need.

Individuals and families may need support from several parts of the Public Protection system. In line with the work of The Promise we are committed to working with our partners to deliver a more coherent and consistent approach to ensure the best possible outcomes for individuals, families and the workforce that supports them.

There is real energy for change across the system.

We know that Scotland has seen a reduction in the number of children and young people in care since the Independent Care Review was concluded. In 2016, there were just under fifteen and a half thousand looked after children and young people in Scotland. In 2020, the year The Promise was made, there were around fourteen and a half thousand looked after children and young people in Scotland, and the latest figures from July 2023 show that in the 3 years since then this has reduced further to around twelve thousand two hundred.

There may of course be many reasons for this change. We know and we understand that numbers alone do not tell the whole story. However, this does demonstrate that there is a shift in how the care system in Scotland is working and that the supports that are available to children, young people and families are pivoting toward a new way of working.

This is represented in changes in organisational structures; increased training and understanding among the workforce; altered approach to delivering business; and an increased level of consciousness to corporate parenting responsibilities. In short, an acceptance of responsibility for the welfare and the needs of our care experienced community.

We remain confident that the national ambition that has resulted from the Independent Care Review can be realised. This energy must continue to build and we must support it to do so in order to introduce the required shift from reaction to prevention.

Our ambition is clear, where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay together. To achieve this families must be given support to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way. In recognising that the support required for every child may be different and that the journey may not be linear, the Scottish Government, The Promise Scotland and other partners assume that staying with family will include at home with parents and may at key stages and for whatever reason, be in kinship care with adults with whom they already have a healthy, enduring relationship and who are already within their own family (or close friends) network.

To continue to work towards this the pace of change must continue to build and the momentum must be continued through our activities:

- To keep families together through whole family support and support for our children, young people and adults with care experience
- To renew our efforts to support pre-birth to three, recognising that this is a critical window to support families and to support early child development
- To ensure a good childhood for our children and young people
- To create the right scaffolding of help, support and accountability to be ready and responsive when it is required, and
- To build capacity in our workforce and our systems to support the change required to improve the lives of our children, young people and families.

The Journey To Change And Improvement

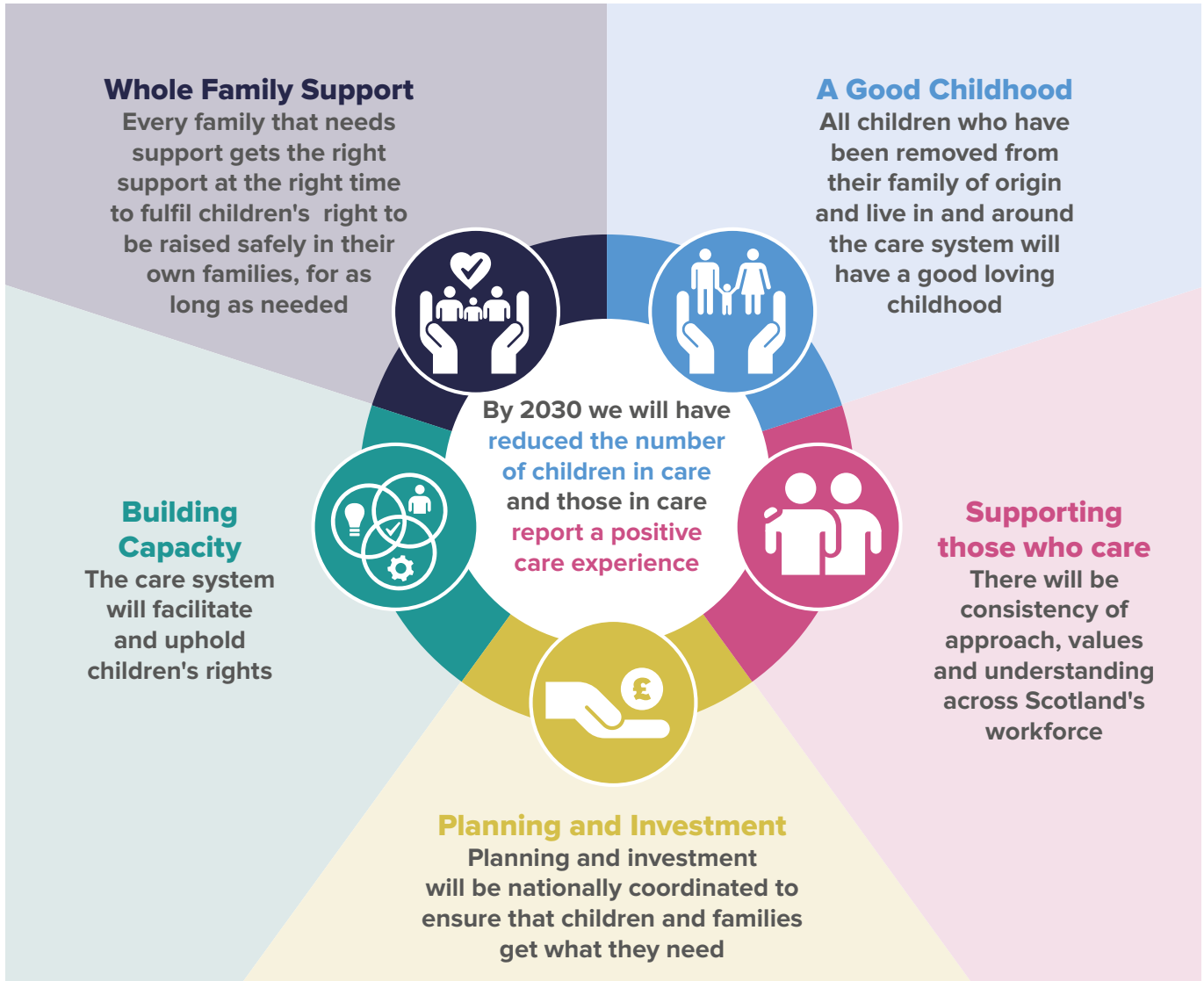
The publication of The Promise challenged public services to create the conditions to reform the 'care system', including the scaffolding and structures that make up the system itself.

Before any transformational change can take place, a comprehensive understanding of current systems is needed. It is not possible to simply build a new system without first paying attention to what is already there. Whilst some actions and changes can be considered relatively straightforward and implemented quickly, others require consultation, collaboration, and testing to have any chance of lasting sustainability at a national level.

Following publication of The Promise Implementation Plan in March 2022, the Scottish Government has taken a structured approach to the work required to help direct the policies and actions across 26 Directorates of Government. This is a major change programme for Scotland and it is essential that it is connected and in step with other major change programmes relating to Tackling Child Poverty, Education, Justice and Health.

To achieve this the Scottish Government has adopted a quality improvement approach to bring focus to areas that will have the greatest impact on:

- children, young people and families in care
- children, young people and families on the edges of care,
- young people transitioning out of the care system and
- adults with care experience

Figure One: The Scottish Government Theory of Change

This approach has strengthened the connections (national and local) to accelerate improvement and apply a method that supports systematic change, bringing evidence into practice reliably and consistently.

This systematic approach is underpinned by the **Quality Improvement Journey**¹. This offers a method that can be followed at any level – from macro (large, national approaches) to the micro (local team) level. Using this method, we have

developed a high level Theory of Change, which maps and allows us to continually test how we deliver the changes required to achieve the objectives of The Promise.

The Theory of Change is aligned to The Promise Scotland's Plan 21-24 and progress against all of the actions and commitments are mapped against this Theory of Change. The full detail of this progress is set out in **Part 7**.

1 Quality Improvement journey | Turas | Learn (nhs.scot)

A Person and A Family Centred Approach To Change

Our approach to supporting improved outcomes for children and young people with care experience is underpinned by a commitment to protecting and upholding children's rights. This commitment was strengthened by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Reconsidered by the Scottish Parliament in December 2023 the Bill was approved unanimously, and all provisions included within the Act commenced in July 2024. This will bring into reality an increased level of recognition and protection of children's rights beyond the level elsewhere in the UK.

This legislative position strengthens our national commitment to **Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)** in offering the right help at the right time, to each and every child and young person in Scotland to reach their full potential. It is essential that we continue to adopt a person centred approach to our activities and the system must continue to work in an adaptable way that reflects the difference in need and mould to the needs of the individual and the family.

In October 2023 we published the **GIRFEC Child's Plan Practice Statement** to communicate our current policy intention regarding the roles and responsibilities of practitioners involved with the development and monitoring of the non-statutory GIRFEC Child's Plan. This accompanies the suite of refreshed GIRFEC practice guidance produced in 2022. The GIRFEC guidance underpins our approaches to holistic family support and contributes to the shared aims and wellbeing outcomes of the Children, Young People and Families Outcome Framework. The GIRFEC multi-agency approach provides a framework to plan care and support for children, young people and families across a range of services to help families meet their individual needs, to thrive and to stay together.

This approach to family support is key to the successful delivery of The Promise. Building on

existing adult best practice and learning from our approach to every child, **Getting it right for everyone (GIRFE)** is a multi-agency approach to health and social care support and services from young adulthood to end of life care. It will form the future practice model of all health and social care professionals and shape the design and delivery of services, ensuring that people's needs are met.

GIRFE pathfinders and partners are committed to co-designing GIRFE with people with lived experience across Scotland. This includes engagement with people with lived experience – focusing on people in addiction services, people in prisons, people registered at deep end GP Practices, and young people in transition from GIRFEC to GIRFE and/or families with complex needs.

GIRFE pathfinders and partners are currently testing implementation of the GIRFE 'Team Around The Person' toolkit, which has been co-designed with people with lived experience across Scotland. Once further testing is complete, the toolkit will be published to allow wider implementation across Scotland.

The Scottish Government wants to ensure that families are able to access the help they need, where and when they need it. In July 2022, our **National Framework Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support was published**, to promote consistent standards of practice across Scotland which will help to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

Family support defines a range of services to help families meet their individual needs, to thrive and to stay together and this ambition is being further realised through our investment in Whole Family Wellbeing. This investment is helping Children's Services Planning Partnerships implement whole system transformational change. Funding is focussed on the system changes required to shift investment towards early intervention and prevention activities, to ensure families can access support before they reach crisis point. Further detail of our approach to Whole Family Wellbeing is set out in **Part 4**.

The future structure and approach to children's services across Scotland is central to how we ensure a consistency in provision and response.

To inform this the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) were commissioned to carry out **independent research** to help us answer the question of 'What is needed to ensure that children, young people and families get the help they need, when they need it?'

The research is clear about the challenges facing children, young people and families and those supporting them across Scotland. It has provided considerable insight into care systems both at home and internationally and a solid evidence base is offered for improvement that can be made without, or alongside, structural changes. A number of themes for improvement have been identified from the research findings and an exercise is underway to identify and map any ongoing work which will address these. Further detail of the CELCIS research findings and the developing Children's Services Reform Improvement Work Plan are set out in **Part 2**.

Working Together to Introduce Change

The work that is underway, is being driven through national and local implementation. The **Verity House Agreement** signed in June 2023, sets out the way that national and local government will work together to approach shared priorities and how we will engage. This agreement to shared priorities, particularly in relation to tackling poverty and sustainable public services, provides the platform for a strengthened relationship for service delivery.

Joint working to keep The Promise is carried through regular engagement between the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise and the COSLA spokesperson for Children and Young People.

If Scotland is to be the best place in the world to grow up, we need our public services to work for, and with children, young people, and their families. The stabilisation of family circumstances through income maximisation, employability and effective whole family support can provide a platform. In turn it can help us keep more children at home.

In March 2022, 'Best Start, Bright Futures' was published. This sets out **how we will work together to deliver on Scotland's national mission to tackle child poverty**. We know that poverty negatively impacts on the wellbeing of families, with the negative effects intensifying the more persistent and deep their experience. Tackling poverty will help us to support better outcomes for parents and carers and, vitally, to make a life-long difference for children and young people.

The Scottish Government is committed to reforming our public services. We know that if we want to continue to work with our communities to build better lives for everyone in Scotland, we have to change the way we deliver services. We want people's experience of services to be efficient, high quality, and effective for all.

Where people are at risk, we want all services to be able to identify this early, to build relationships and understand needs, and work together in partnership, with a clear understanding of the full range of resources in a community, to meet those needs. This relational, preventative, place-based way of delivering services is happening across Scotland and we want it to be available to all people who need it.

This is vital to maintaining our ability to help people in the future. Only by doing this can we improve outcomes in our communities; reduce the inequalities that we know some people still face; and ensure the future sustainability of our services

by moving our focus to prevention and support, and away from helping people out of crisis.

The Promise put these reform principles into action. There is growing practical evidence of earlier intervention, holistic family support, and services working together to enable young people and their families to thrive in their terms leading to direct and measurable benefits. As we continue to build up our understanding of the change in young people's lives, this evidence will grow.

Health and Social Care Reform

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care set out a new a vision for health and social care services in Scotland in June 2024, to address these challenges and give focus to our reform work. Our vision is to 'enable people to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.' This is supported by four key areas of work: improving population health, a focus on prevention and early intervention, providing quality services, and maximising access, all underpinned by a person-centred approach.

We know that by improving the health of current and prospective caregivers, reform in health and social care at large can contribute to a reduction in number of children in care. Furthermore, and improvement in the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Work is already underway and being coordinated through the Care and Wellbeing Portfolio to progress reforms to ensure long term sustainability, reduce health inequalities, deliver services closer to home, further harness the benefits of digital technology, and improve population health outcomes in Scotland. Our approach to reform spans three overlapping horizons. Firstly, and a key priority in the short term, we must ensure that our services are delivered in a way that optimises current arrangements. Secondly and over the medium term, we need to begin to transform how we work and begin to shift the balance of care closer to

people's homes and drive forward more proactive approaches. In the longer term. we need to fundamentally change how we think about the delivery of health and care, driving investment in prevention and early intervention.

And we are developing a Population Health Framework, to take a cross-government and cross-sector approach to improve the key building blocks of health including: employment, housing, education and skills, economic stability and complemented with the promotion of positive health behaviours and appropriate healthcare. The Framework in being developed in collaboration with key partners, including COSLA and NHS Scotland leaders.'

Supporting The Workforce

To ensure that we create a Scotland where all children feel loved, respected, listened to, and heard, in decisions that affect them, we must develop and invest in the workforce. Attracting and retaining the people with the right skills, as well as developing the workforce in their roles and raising the status of the children's social care and social work professions, remain a key focus for the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government acknowledges the significant pressures that the workforce continues to face and is committed to taking immediate action to address these challenges and, irrespective of profession or sector, to support the delivery of high quality services underpinned by trusting relationships, trauma informed practice and protecting children's rights.

We will work with partners to ensure the workforce feel valued, and have the right skills to deliver services that contribute to achieving positive outcomes for children, young people and their families. We will aim to improve the evidence base for workforce planning for children's services, as well as strengthen and diversify the higher and further education, and apprenticeship offers for careers in children's services.

To address current recruitment and retention challenges, we will work to ensure that Fair Work principles are applied consistently across the children's services landscape. As part of this collaborative approach, the Children and Families National Leadership Group is bringing together senior leaders from national and local government, children's social work services, health, learning, justice, the third sector and other partners.

Working with key stakeholders, we are aiming to ensure an effective voice of the workforce across the care sector. This includes:

- a new national framework for social care and social work has been initially agreed by Scottish Ministers and COSLA Leaders as part of ongoing discussions on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, and
- a joint Workforce Improvement Plan with COSLA and key stakeholders (to be published in autumn 2024) which seeks to address the recruitment and retention challenges facing the Social Work profession which include, implementing workforce improvements and refining social work vacancy data to enhance increased accuracy in planning for the demands of the future workforce.

Through this work the Scottish Government continues to work collaboratively with stakeholders including COSLA, Social Work Scotland, Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW), Unison, and Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to ensure the direction of travel is influenced and informed by the voices of social work and other key stakeholders.

We are developing a refreshed Common Core framework of essential knowledge and values for everyone who provides support to children, from birth to young adulthood, and their families. The original 'Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Values for the "Children's Workforce" in Scotland' (the Common Core) was introduced in 2012 to describe the knowledge, skills, understanding and values which should be the foundation characteristics of all those working with children and young people in Scotland. This

refreshed framework focuses on the core values and learning required to deliver the Promise and provide holistic family support and rights-based practice in accordance with UNCRC and GIRFEC principles.

The **National Trauma Transformation Programme** (previously called the National Trauma Training Programme) provides accessible, evidence-based trauma training resources and support for implementation. Work continues with COSLA, the Improvement Service, Resilience Learning Partnership, and NHS National Education Scotland to support organisations to develop and implement trauma-informed approaches to their workforces and via their services.

The **Trauma Responsive Social Work Services (TRSWS) Programme** workplan has been agreed to ensure Scotland's social work services are able to recognise where people are affected by trauma, and respond in ways which reduce risks of retraumatising and supports recovery. Delivery of the programme commenced in October 2023, initially with four areas, and work is taking place across children's, justice and adult social work services and workforce. Trauma Skilled Practice training and follow up support has been delivered to over 200 newly qualified and early career social workers. Learning from early implementation sites will help inform scheduling, with further areas across Scotland to be supported from 2024 until December 2026.

Education Scotland in collaboration with NHS Education Service have developed the Keeping Trauma in Mind professional learning programme (KTiM). This programme complements the NTTP and includes practical examples of what trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practice looks like in an educational setting. The programme is offered online nationally and as bespoke in-person sessions for individual local authorities.

We continue to work with partners to support the workforce to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential child care settings. In alignment with the aspirations of The Promise, stakeholders within the residential sector across Scotland have successfully engaged in Promise Partnership

funded pilot projects which focus on the development of relationship based and reflective practice.

We continue to rollout 'Transforming Connections', a tailored 'Trauma-Skilled' level training and coaching package, to people who work alongside children and young people with care experience in priority sectors of the Children and Families workforce in Scotland, including school nurses, health visitors, secure and residential care providers and Children's Hearings Scotland.

In addition, the development of trauma training and resources to support alternative caregivers (adoptive parents, kinship and foster carers) provide trauma-informed care for their children and young people is being considered as part of the long term delivery plan for the NTTP, with next steps currently being identified.

Following a review in May 2024, revised Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) codes of practice were launched to ensure consistency with the skills and practice requirements of The Promise focused on trauma-informed family support.

The **Advanced Social Work Practice Framework**, due to be launched in spring 2025, will set out the structures which support social workers to progress through different career phases and describe a cohesive and supportive series of academic, learning and development, and work based opportunities to support the workforce, both now and in the future. The framework is an opportunity to influence a culture which promotes, acknowledges and values evidence based practice and to recognise the role experienced practitioners can play in using their knowledge and expertise to support the future workforce. Following implementation of the framework, consideration will be given to developing a framework for paraprofessionals, and as part of work to widen entry routes into the profession more broadly, we are scoping the opportunity to introduce a Graduate Apprenticeship for social work.

The **National Care Service** creates an opportunity to further our aspirations and support achievement of the strategic aims for delivering The Promise, which may, in turn, result in improvements in children's services. It will empower us to strike the right balance between national consistency, regional strategic planning and local delivery, and present further opportunities to set standards of care, reduce variation in thresholds for and quality of services, improve accountability, and enhance alignment across primary care, community health, social care, social work, children's and social justice services.

A **National Social Work Agency (NSWA)** will provide professional leadership and have national oversight of the social work profession – driving improvements in social work education, training and development, national workforce planning, improvement approaches and providing effective support for implementation of policy in local systems. It will drive improvements in social work, for students through to senior leaders, across public, third and independent sectors.

Our aim is a skilled, supported and sustainable workforce that provides high quality person-led support underpinned by rights-based approaches to enable better, more consistent outcomes for people who need social work.

A **Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework** is being developed to support public authorities to embed children's rights in public services.

The Framework will provide a single point to access new and existing resources and training on children's rights and taking a children's human rights approach. It will be a flexible and adaptable resource that can be used across a wide range of sectors, giving users an enhanced understanding of how they can uphold children's rights.

We have worked closely with stakeholders to support development of the framework. This included public authorities, and two groups of co-production partners: a Children and Families Panel, and a Professionals Panel.

A training plan will accompany the Framework to support staff in public authorities who are responsible for developing and delivering training. It will support them to plan and deliver appropriate training for different staff members on children's rights and taking a children's human rights approach.

The Framework and Training Plan, which will launch in summer 2024, will support public authorities to experience the value of using a children's human rights approach and how this contributes to other local and national strategic priorities, aiding a transformation in service design and delivery.

Further detail of these commitments, progress so far, and next steps is set out in **Part 2**, **Part 3**, and **Part 7**.

Monitoring & Reporting Change

Progress is being made across several key areas in our journey towards keeping The Promise. The latest statistics tell us about where we have come from since the announcement of the independent care review in 2016, through to when The Promise was made in 2020, and what latest available data can tell us about where we are now.

While national level statistics cannot be used in isolation to determine whether the experiences of Scotland's looked after children and young people are improving, they can help to guide our understanding of where progress is being made, and what areas warrant further attention.



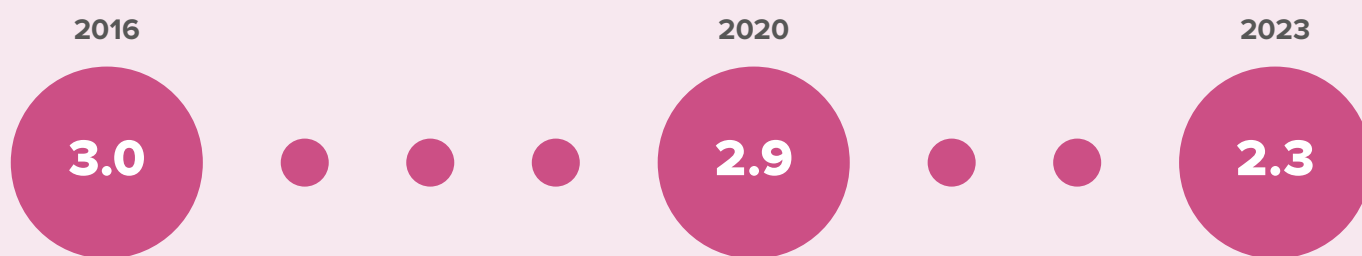
The national picture through statistics: where have we come from, and where are we now?

Our baseline for understanding how Scotland is changing as we work to Keep The Promise begins in 2016, when the independent care view was launched. By looking at the direction of change between 2016 and 2020, we get an understanding of the direction of travel within the system in the years leading up to the Promise being made. This understanding of where we have come from helps us to contextualise the journey since 2020 in our ambition to Keep The Promise, and where we are now.

Child protection

Figure 2: Rate of children on the child protection register

Rate per 1,000 children on the Child Protection Register by local authority on 31 July



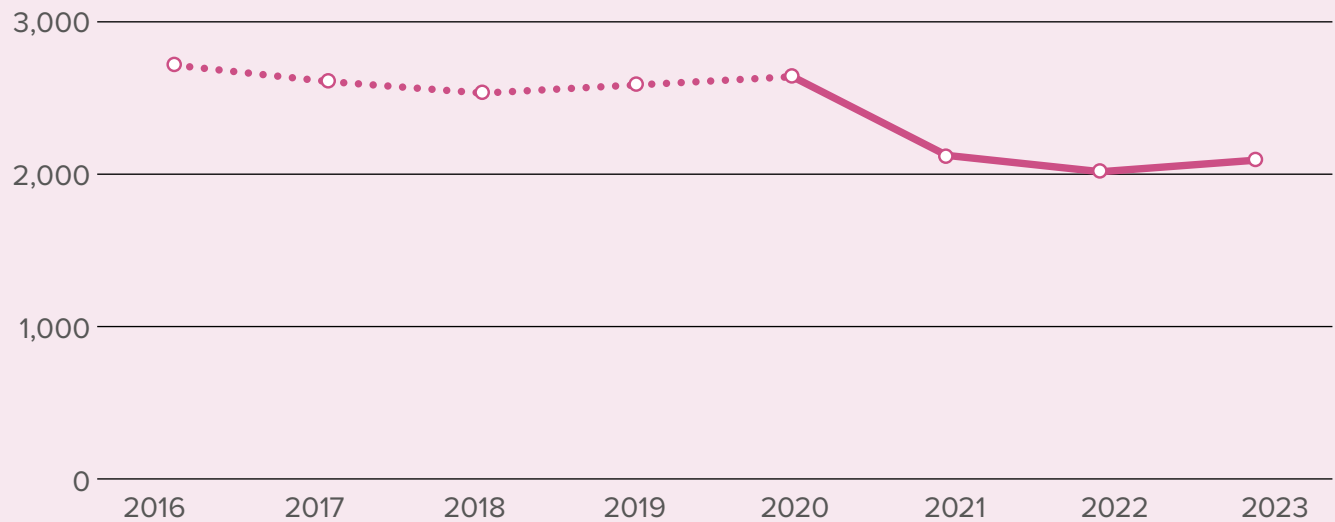
Where have we come from?

The rate and number of children on the child protection register fell very slightly in the 5 years up to 2020. For every 1,000 0-17 year olds in Scotland, 3.0 were on the child protection register in 2016. This fell to 2.9 in 2020. The total number of children on the child protection register also fell by 2.7% between 2016 and 2020, from 2,715 to 2,641.

Over this same period, fewer children also joined the child protection register each year, with the number of yearly registrations also falling over this period by 7.2%. In each of these years, the vast majority (85% – 87%) of children who were de-registered had been on the register for less than a year.

Chart 1: Number of children on the child protection register

Number of children on the Child Protection Register on 31 July, 2016-2023



Where are we now?

The number of children on the child protection register fell much more quickly between 2020 and 2023. On 31st July 2023 was 20.7% lower than on the same day in 2020, at 2,094 (down from 2,641). This has meant a reduction in the rate per 1,000 children on the child protection register from 2.9 to 2.3 over the same period.

A similar trend has been seen in the number of children joining the register each year – the number of yearly registrations has fallen each year since 2020, and was 18.6% lower in 2023 than in 2020, at 3,231 (down from 3,967).

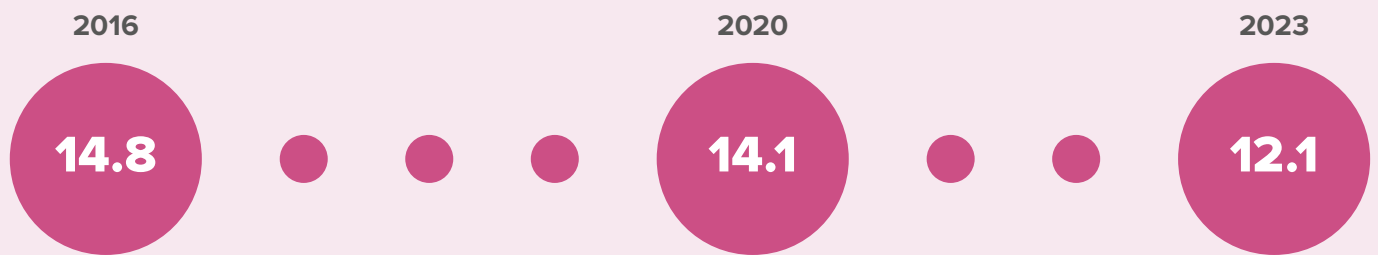
Around half of the children on the child protection register are under 5, including those registered pre-birth. This was true in both 2020 (50%) and 2023 (47%).

Progress on our commitment to support local areas to implement the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland is detailed in **Part 2** of this report.

Looked after children

Figure 3: Rate of looked after children

Rate of looked after children per 1,000 children on 31st July each year



Where have we come from?

The rate of children who were looked after on 31st July 2016 was 14.8 per 1,000 and by 2020 this had fallen to 14.1. The overall number of looked after children also fell in the 5 years up to 2020, from 15,317 to 14,458.

The relative proportions of children in different placement types saw very little movement, with the proportion of children placed in the community (90%) and those placed in residential accommodation (10%) remaining the same across the whole 5-year period.

Chart 2: Total number of looked after children

Total number of looked after children on 3st July each year, 2016-2023



Where are we now?

Between 2020 and 2023 the number of children and young people who were statutorily identified as 'looked after children' has reduced by 15.6%. While this reduction is in line with the overall ambition of The Promise to reduce the number of children and young people needing to enter care, more context is needed to understand whether this reduction is indicative of positive change.

Since 2020, the proportion of looked after children who are living at home with their parents has fallen by 5 percentage points from one in four, to one in five. We know that to keep The Promise, families need to be supported to stay together, but that there are certain circumstances where it is not possible for children to live with their parent(s). Over the same period, there has also been a 4 percentage point increase in the proportion of children being placed with friends or relatives in kinship care. This may be an indication that in cases where it is deemed safest for children to live away from their parents for a period, placements which minimise disruption by keeping children with a caregiver already known to them are being prioritised.

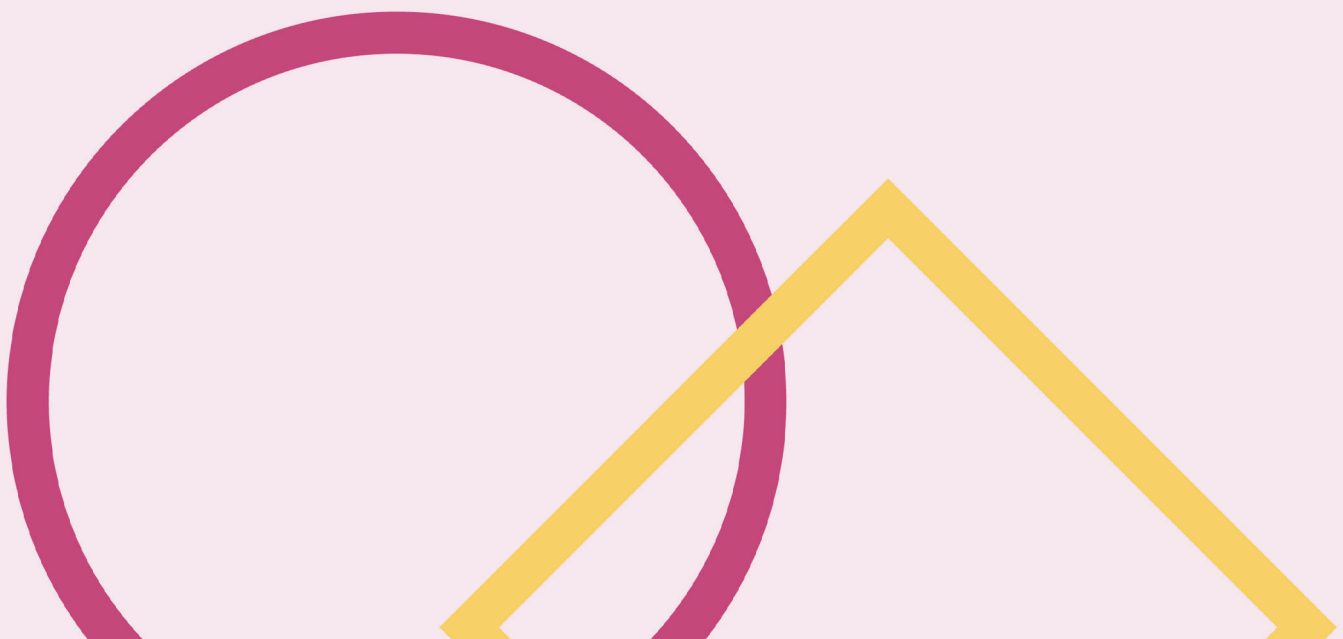
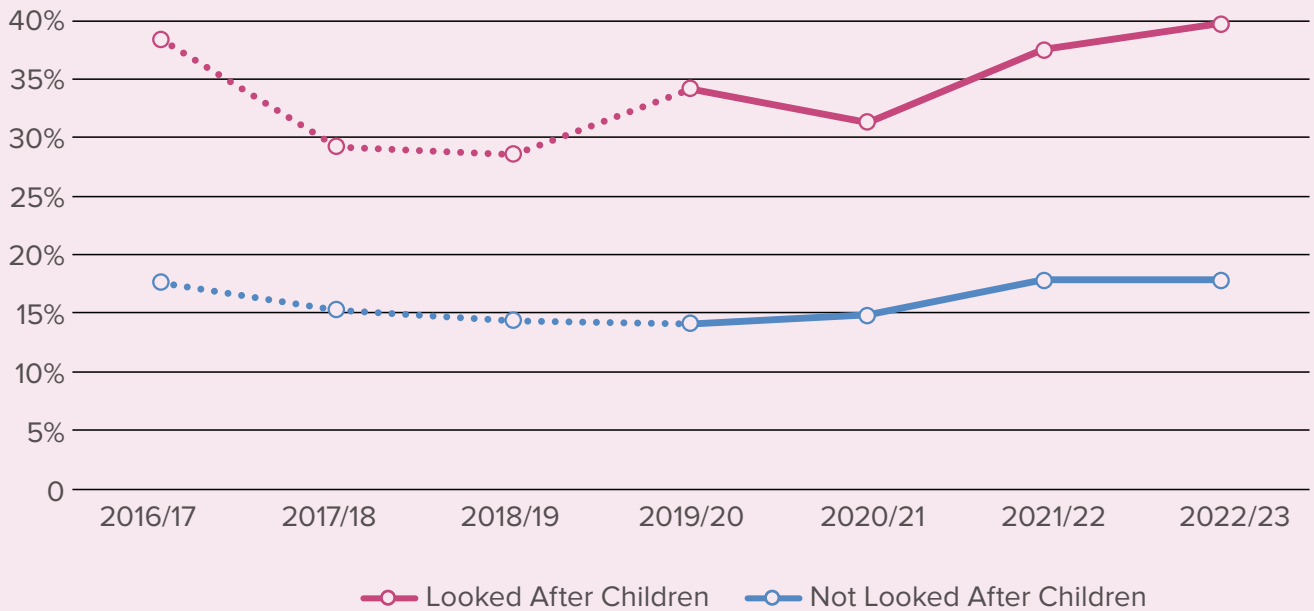
Over the last 10 years, there have been decreases in the number of children looked after for short periods of time. Of all children who ceased being looked after in 2020, 8% had been looked after for 6 weeks or less, and by 2023 this had fallen to 5%. This meant a decrease from 264 to 165 children being looked after in short-term placements. A similar trend can also be seen for children whose episodes in care lasted between 6 weeks and 6 months. While we are unable to say definitively, when looking at these figures alongside the decreasing overall numbers of looked after children, this could suggest that preventative work within communities is meaning that children who in previous years would have needed a short spell of care, are now being supported without becoming formally looked after.

We are seeing fewer of the very youngest children entering care each year – in 2013, 1,737 children aged under 4 entered care, making up 39% of all children who entered care during the year. By 2020, this had fallen to 1,346 under 4s which was still 39% of the total amount. The latest statistics from 2023 show that this reduction has continued, with the number of under 4s entering care during the year falling to 966, making up 32% of all children who entered care during the year. This could be an indication that early years prevention work is generating positive change in preventing some of the youngest children from entering care.

Early Child Development

Children in the care system are more likely to have concerns about their development from an early age. At the 13-15 month Child Health Review, one third of looked after children already have concerns. This rises to nearly 40% at the later 27-30 month reviews, which was more than twice the rate for non-looked after children (18%). The gap between the proportion of looked after children and non-looked after children with a developmental concern at the 27-30 month review was the highest on record in 2022/23, at 22 percentage points. This latest report also found that the deprivation gradient between those living in the most deprived fifth of areas and least deprived fifth of areas was the highest it had been on record.

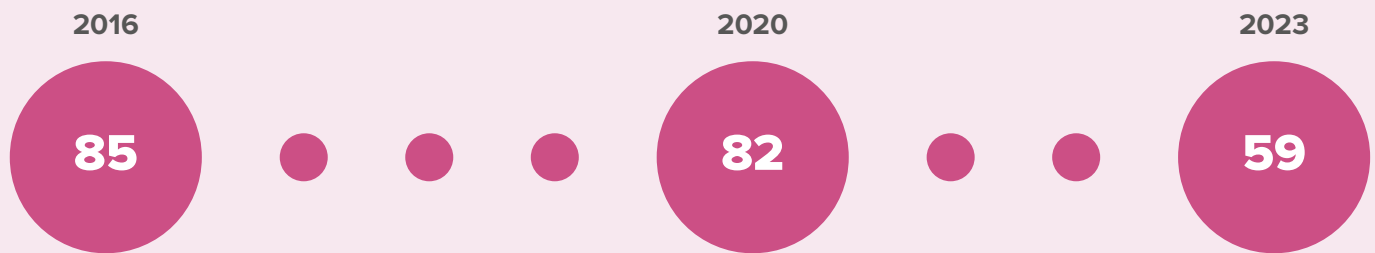
Chart 3: Percentage of Children with a Development Concern at 27-30 months



Secure care and prisons

Figure 4: Average number of daily secure care residents

Average number of daily residents in secure care accommodation during the year



Where have we come from?

In 2016, there were 256 admissions to secure care throughout the year. By 2020, this figure had fallen by 24.2% to 194 admissions throughout the year.

The number of residents in secure care accommodation on average each day was 85 throughout 2016. This figure was 3.5% lower in 2020, at 82 residents on average each day.

Chart 4: Average number of secure care residents

Average number of daily residents in secure care accommodation during the year 2016-2023



Where are we now?

During 2022-23, there were an average of 59 children in secure care accommodation – this was 28% lower than it was in 2020.

Over a third of young people in secure care in Scotland in 2023 were from outwith Scotland. As part of a wider trend ongoing since 2014, the proportion of children from outwith Scotland in secure care rose from 34% to 45% between 2020 and 2022. However, on average in 2023, this figure has fallen back down to 37%.

According to the latest Prison Population Statistics the average daily number of young people aged 16 & 17 fell by 71% between 2019-20 and 2022-23 to an average daily population of 8.8. Regulations to end the detention of under 18s in young offenders institutions came into force on 28 August 2024. Under 18s will now be detained in alternative settings, such as secure accommodation. Those under 18s who were detained in a YOI before 28 August have now safely transitioned to new settings. Further updates on how we are working to support children and young people involved in the justice system are set out in **Part 7** of this report.

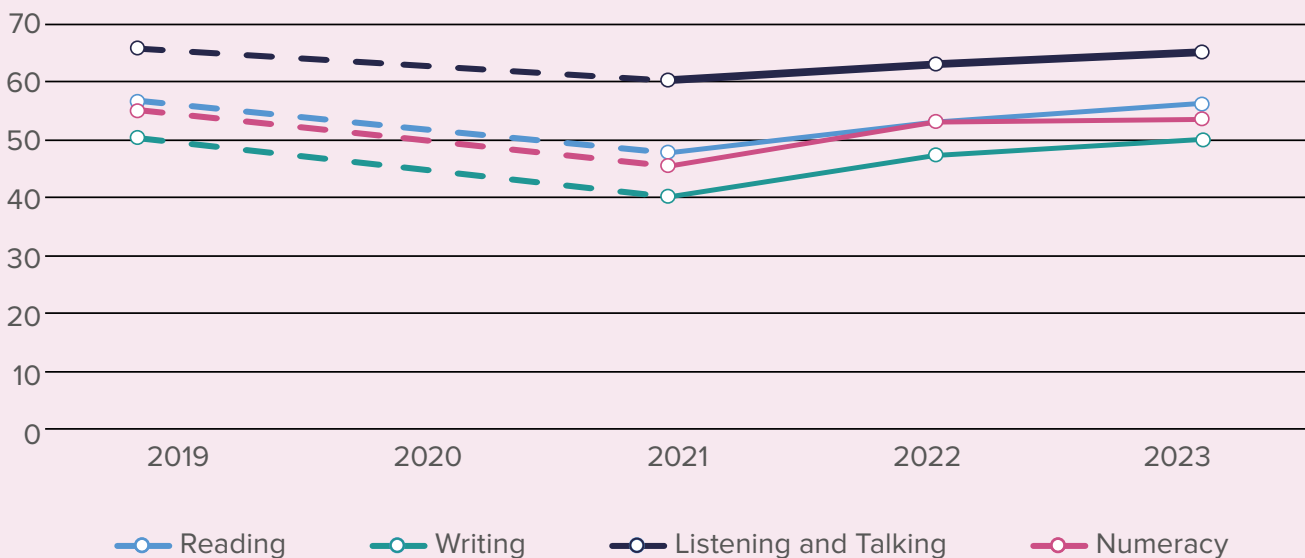
Educational Outcomes

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL):

Data on ACEL outcomes for looked after children is available from 2019 onwards, however was not collected during the 2020 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of looked-after pupils achieving the level relevant to their stage fell between 2019 and 2021, and have been increasing across all subjects each year since 2021. Levels have not yet returned to where they were pre-pandemic.

Chart 5: Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence level relevant to stage

Percentage of children achieving the Curriculum for Excellence level relevant to their stage by subject: 2018/19, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23

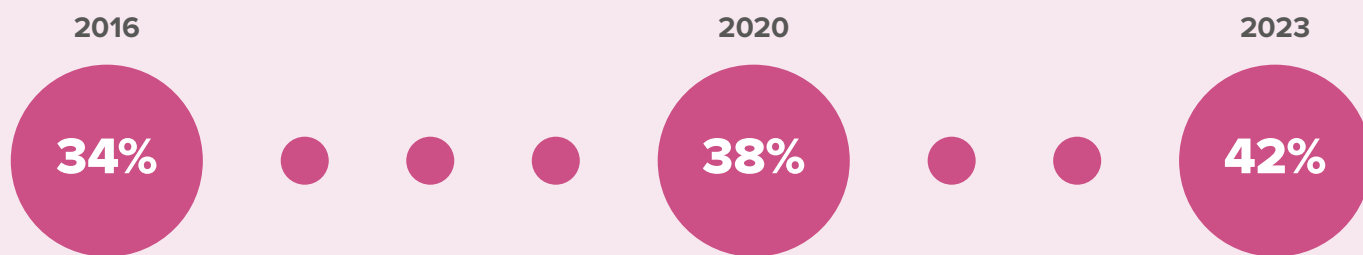


Attainment and post-school destinations

The proportion of pupils who were looked after during their final year at school that went on to a positive destination 9 months after leaving rose by 11 percentage points in the 4 years up to 2020, from 65% to 75%. In particular, the proportion going on to further education rose by 17 percentage points, and the proportion who were unemployed but seeking employment fell by 12 percentage points.

Figure 6: proportion of looked after leavers achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 5

Proportion of school leavers who were looked after at some point in the final year who achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher.



Education attainment for leavers looked after during their last year at school rose at all levels between the 2015/16 and 2019/20 school years, with the proportion of children achieving:

- 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 3 or higher up by 3 percentage points, to 87%
- 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 4 or higher up by 2 percentage points, to 72%
- 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher up by 4 percentage points, to 38%
- 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 6 or higher up by 3 percentage points, to 14%
- 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 7 or higher up by 1 percentage points, to 2%

The gap between attainment levels for pupils looked after within their final year and all pupils also shrank during the 4 years up to 2020, apart from for young people obtaining at least one qualification at SCQF level 7 or higher, where the gap between leavers looked after within their last year and all children grew by 3 percentage points from 18 to 21. The largest reduction in the gap between leavers looked after within their last year and all children was for those who achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher, where the gap fell by 4 percentage points from 52 to 48.

Chart 6: Proportion of leavers obtaining at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher

Proportion of school leavers who were looked after at some point in the final year who achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher, 2015/16-2022/23



Where are we now?

Between 2022 and 2023, the proportion of looked after school leavers achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 3, 4, 5 or 6 fell. At SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5, the gap between the proportion of looked after leavers achieving at least one qualification compared to all pupils also widened. It is important to note however that when comparing the latest figures to the last data point before the COVID-19 pandemic (2019), attainment has risen, and the attainment gap has narrowed, at all levels. In 2023, 42.3% of leavers who were looked after within their final year achieved 1 qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher compared to 84.8% of all leavers. Since 2020, the proportion of all school leavers achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 has fallen by 0.9 percentage points, whereas for pupils who were looking after during their final year of school, this has risen by 4.2 percentage points.

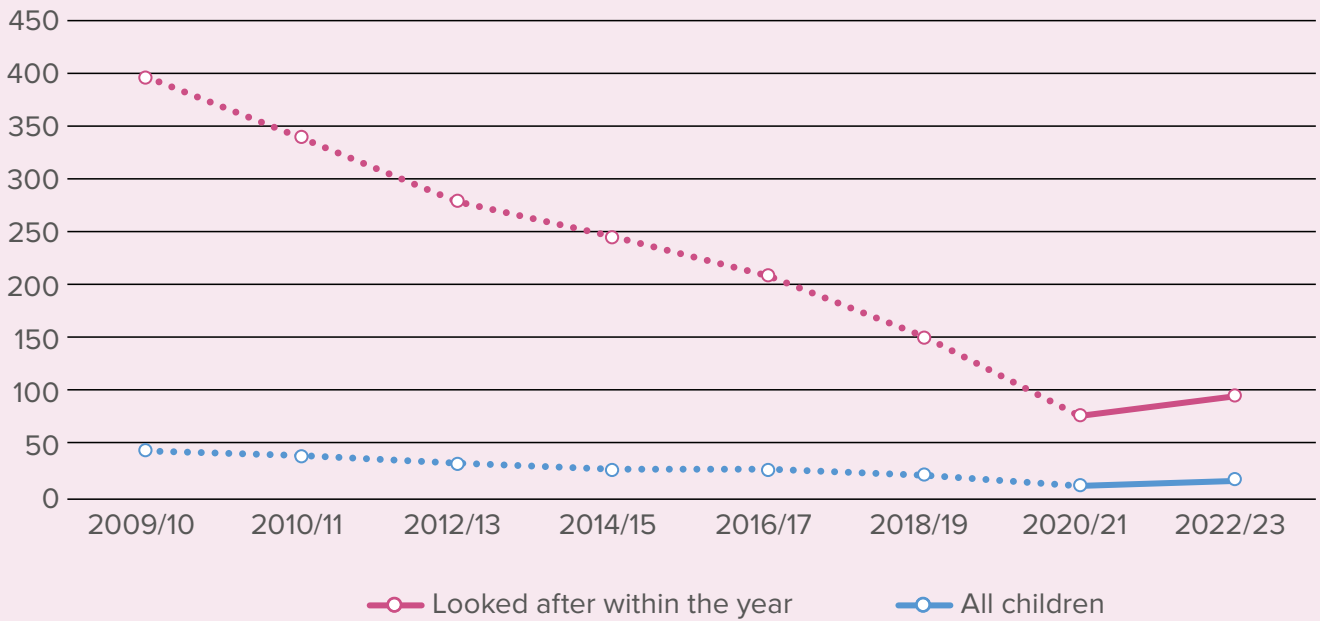
The gap between looked after leavers and all children has fallen by 5 percentage points since 2020, but still stands at 43 percentage points.

Exclusions

Exclusions data is gathered every other year, with the most recent update coming from the 2022/23 school year. The number of exclusions per 1,000 pupils for all children and those who were looked after within the year nearly halved between 2018/19 and 2020/21, going from 152 to 78, and then rose again in 2022/23 to 97.

Chart 7: Number of exclusions per 1,000 pupils

Number of exclusions per 1,000 pupils for those who were looked after within the year and all pupils, 2009/10 – 2022/23



It is unclear how much of this drop during the 2020/21 school year was caused by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however large reductions were also observed across all pupils at all stages. In 2022/23, the rate of exclusions for children looked after within the year was still 36% lower than the last year that was not affected by COVID_19 related school closures. In 2022/23, the rate of exclusions per 1,000 pupils was 5.7 times higher for looked after pupils than all pupils, despite a huge decrease in the gap in rates between all children and those looked after within the year since 2009/10.

The rate of children who experience an exclusion within the year, as opposed to the number of overall exclusions, is also just over 3 times higher for children looked after within the year, meaning children who are looked after within the year are more likely to be excluded multiple times than all children.

Further updates on how we are working to support the care experienced community in their access to education are set out in **Part 7** of this report.

While progress towards keeping The Promise cannot be measured entirely through quantitative statistics, these help us to understand where the picture appears to be improving, and where future attention needs to be directed. Our ambitions for how we plan to monitor progress towards keeping The Promise, working jointly with The Promise Scotland and COSLA, are set out in **Part 5**.

In order to keep The Promise, Scottish Government has committed to making changes that should help Scotland to achieve these positive outcomes for children, young people and families. Progress against these commitments is set out in **Part 2**.





Part 2

Progress on Commitments

The Scottish Government Promise Implementation Plan identifies a broad range of actions and commitments that span policies and portfolios. This includes immediate actions to improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people, adults and their families who are currently in or on the edge of care; and action over the longer term to improve the level of support for families from birth through to adulthood to significantly reduce the numbers of families coming into the care system.

The Scottish Government Promise Implementation Plan broadly follows the structure of The Promise and sets commitments and activities against key themes of:

- Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support And Support for Our Care Experienced Children, Young People and Adults
- A Good Childhood for Our Children and Young People
- Creating The Right Scaffolding
- Building Capacity

In order to present the progress made, these key themes are mirrored in the updates outlined in this part of the plan and are reflected in the detailed review against all of the actions and commitments presented in **Part 7**.

Progress on Key Commitments

In 2022 The Promise Implementation Plan identified fifteen overarching key commitments. These were identified as important areas of activity to drive forward the initial change required on our journey to keep The Promise. An update on each of these key commitments is presented below.

- **We will invest £500 million over the course of this Parliamentary term, beginning with £50 million in financial year 2022-23, in preventative spend through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.**

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme aims to enable and support the system change required at local Children's Services Planning Partnership (CSPP) level to deliver holistic family support so that families can access the help they need, where and when needed. This is a transition fund, which is focused on delivering the system changes required to shift investment towards early intervention and prevention activities.

Since 2022-23, £50m per annum has been allocated to support activity focused on:

- providing funding direct to CSPPs to build capacity for change and test and scale transformational practice;
- providing national support for local change, including 3 collaborative partnerships with CSPPs to explore learning about what will enable this system change;
- building a co-ordinated cross-portfolio approach to delivering system change.

Going in to 2024-25, we have maintained this commitment to spend, allowing us to continue the programme of activity which has been established across a range of workstreams. In particular, it maintains our multi-year commitment of £32m to Children's Service's Planning Partnerships to progress transformation plans at local level.

The Year 1 **Evaluation** was published on 31 January. Further case study examples, including information about projects we have funded as part of a cross Scottish Government approach to system change, are available in our online Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Learning into Action **Knowledge Hub**.

Further details on the Programme's approach to date, and our plans for future investment are set out in **Part 4**.

■ **We will support local areas to implement the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021.**

The **National Guidance for Child Protection** was published in 2021 and updated in 2023 to reflect legislative, policy and practice changes. This guidance supports practice that places children and young people's experience, needs, wishes and feelings at the centre of decision-making, builds on strengths as well as addressing risk, and focuses on working in partnership with families and communities.

A National Child Protection Guidance Implementation Group, chaired by the Deputy Social Work Advisor, was established in September 2021 for a period of 2 years to provide strategic oversight and offer support to local areas as they implemented the 2021 Guidance. The Group concluded in September 2023 after delivering a number of significant pieces of work.

As part of the Implementation Group, a Monitoring and Evaluation subgroup was established to develop and implement an approach to monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Guidance up to September 2023. An **evaluation**

presenting the findings was published by CELCIS in March 2024 that highlighted significant progress had been made by local areas despite challenging circumstances. It also confirmed that implementation is ongoing for many areas and more time is needed for the Guidance to properly bed in.

The Scottish Government continues to provide support to some workstreams and will continue to monitor implementation of the National Child Protection Guidance through a range of data sources.

Further detail on implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection is set out in **Part 2**.

■ **We will invest £10 million per annum through our Care Experience Grant: a new £200 annual grant for 16-25 year olds with care experience.**

The Care Experience Grant is now known as the Care Leaver Payment. This change in name better reflects the intention of the payment, to support young people as they move on from care and transition into adulthood. This change also aligns with other forms of assistance currently provided by the Scottish Government.

The amount of the payment was originally proposed as an annual payment of £200 to be paid for 10 years. Following consultation which reflected the impact of the cost of living, and the best potential impact for young people, the approach to support has changed to focus on a one-off payment of £2000.

A public consultation on the Care Leaver Payment concluded in January 2024. Independent analysis of consultation responses was published on 18 June 2024. The responses to the consultation will be used to inform further policy development and decision-making.

Further detail on the background to the Care Leaver Payment and wider work on Transitions that relate to it are set out further on in **Part 2**.

■ **We will set a Recommended National Allowance for foster and kinship allowances.**

In August 2023 the new Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) was announced. This means that all foster and kinship carers across Scotland will receive at least a standard national allowance to help care for the children and young people they look after.

Funded by an additional £16 million from the Scottish Government, the new SRA has benefitted more than 9,000 children. This marks the first time a set rate, which all local authorities must pay, has been introduced across Scotland.

A review of the SRA will begin in autumn 2024 and will help identify any areas where improvements can be made.

■ **We will end the placement of 16 and 17 year olds in young offenders institutions without delay. We will fund care based alternatives to custody and consult on new legislation in spring 2022.**

Policy proposals for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill were subject to public consultation in late March 2022. The Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in December 2022, was passed on 25th April 2024 and became an Act on 4th June 2024 following Royal Assent.

The Act, among other provisions, will enable us to give effect to key aspects of The Promise including ending the detention of 16 and 17 year olds in young offenders' institutions YOIs and raising the maximum age of referral to the Children's Reporter to 18. During Stage 1 proceedings, evidence was provided to committees from a range of stakeholders including the Promise Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland and there was broad support for the principles of the Bill. Regulations to end the detention of under 18s in young offenders institutions came into force on 28 August. In line with the Promise, under 18s will now be detained in alternative settings, such as secure accommodation. Those under 18s who were detained in a YOI before 28 August have now safely transitioned to new settings.

■ **We will strive to ensure that Scotland becomes a nation that does not unnecessarily restrain its children. In March 2022, we will consult on the need for appropriate underpinning in legislation or guidance to ensure children's rights are protected in care settings.**

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill consultation gave consideration to the legal framework for restraint within wider children's services. At this stage, Ministers agreed that legislative change was considered necessary in order to deliver the changes required. Instead, it was agreed that a blended framework of regulation, guidance, practice support and precise reporting is likely to best serve Scotland's children.

Work is ongoing across the Scottish Government in relation to reducing the need to practice restraint and seclusion. This includes working with partners to support the reduction of restraint in practice so that this is no longer used or needed in respect of children and young people in care including;

Education – Following conclusion of the consultation on "Draft Physical Intervention in Schools Guidance" (which focussed on the rights of the child) in October 2022 the guidance is being revised, with a target date for publishing in summer 2024. Alongside the publication of the new guidance, we are exploring options to strengthen the legal framework in this area, including placing the guidance on a statutory basis.

Mental Health – The final report of the **Scottish Mental Health Law Review** set out significant recommendations for change to the scope and purpose of the law. Part of this work will consider specific recommendations to reduce the use of coercive practices, including restraint and seclusion over time within mental health settings.

The Scottish Government response to the **review** was published in June 2023 and we are currently designing and establishing a new programme for reform. We intend to publish an initial delivery plan in 2024. This will include information about the activities that will be taken forward during the first 18 months (from October 2023 – April 2025) to help to achieve the programme aims.

Scottish Prison Service (SPS) – SPS is currently implementing a new restraint framework, based around embedding a human rights-based approach into practice, addressing the rights of all involved within an incident. A primary part of this is the pilot study of a new physical intervention curriculum, alongside dedicated Violence and Restraint Reduction Managers and data driven strategies to proactively manage distressed individuals in custody. A pilot was initiated in April 2023, with a decision to widen the scope of the pilot in early 2024.

The SPS Mental Health Strategy, which outlines the support to be provided and the interface with key partners to ensure holistic, whole person approach to care, will be published in 2024. SPS has also developed a Development and Learning Strategy, “Learning for a Better Future”. The strategy aims to provide a context for development and learning that will enable people within the prison service to have a better life beyond custody and increase the likelihood of desistance.

Secure Care – We continue to work with secure accommodation providers and partners to ensure restraint in such settings is only used as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

The Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ) are supporting implementation of the secure care pathway and standards, which were published in 2020 and include standards around reducing the use of restraint. The Care Inspectorate carried out a review of implementation of those standards and published their findings in late September 2023. Further consideration of the findings will take place across 2024 and 2025.

Residential Childcare – We continue to work with partners to support the workforce to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential childcare settings. Stakeholders within the residential sector across Scotland have successfully engaged in Promise Partnership funded pilot projects which focus on the development of relationship based and reflective practice.

Residential and secure accommodation both follow Holding Safely Guidance, and reporting mechanisms are in place with the Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate inspects residential and secure care homes at least once each year. Restraint procedures, reporting and follow-up are part of that inspection process.

UNCRC Concluding Observations – The UNCRC Concluding Observations include a range of recommendations about monitoring and restricting the use of restraint and seclusion. These form part of over 190 recommendations that are relevant to Scotland on a wide range of issues.

The Scottish Government is carefully considering prioritization of the Concluding Observations. We published our **initial response** to the UN Committee recommendations on 25th March 2024 and are developing our approach to advancing these over the next reporting cycle.

■ **We will work with The Promise Scotland to build an evidence base to understand the best governance, financial arrangements and models of care to assess how we best keep The Promise.**

The establishment of the National Care Service (NCS) will change the social care, community health and social work services landscape in Scotland.

It will provide opportunities to strengthen systems, secure better ways of cooperative working, ensure performance issues can be identified and addressed transparently and supportively, and ensure better outcomes for people accessing support, in addition to improving experiences of those delivering care.

In June 2023, Scottish Ministers and COSLA Leaders agreed to progress a new national framework for community health, social work and social care support services within the NCS. Under this agreement the accountability for services is shared between Scottish Ministers, local authorities and NHS Health Boards. At the

national level, they will work together to drive improvements to the quality, consistency and fairness of these services. A National Care Service Board will be established as the primary forum to discharge this shared accountability.

Local authorities will remain legally responsible for the delivery of social work and social care support and keep the staff and assets associated with those services. Similarly, NHS Health Boards will remain legally responsible for the delivery of primary care and community health services, retaining their staff and assets too.

On 24 June 2024 Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport wrote to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee to provide further detail on the development of the NCS. This package of document explains the changes to the NCS Bill Scottish Government proposes to make at Stage 2 and sets out the preferred approach to children's social care, social work, primary care and community health services.

■ **We will consider establishing a National Social Work Agency to support the workforce and ensure equality of service and support.**

The National Social Work Agency will provide national oversight and leadership for the social work profession, and ensure higher quality and more consistent outcomes for people who need social work support. It will have responsibility for driving improvements to the social work profession, providing national level oversight, and supporting shared accountability. It will bring significantly more coherence and collective focus to national workforce planning for social work and policy implementation whilst ensuring systems are in place to monitor performance. Importantly, it will embed an improvement approach across the sector and improve professional learning and development.

It will work collectively with partners to address workforce pressures and factors impacting on supply and the recruitment and retention of the

social work workforce. It will be an opportunity to address some of the longstanding issues impacting on the sector and will seek to improve consistency in service delivery and crucially, enable social workers to implement right-based practice and work more effectively to support people to transform their lives.

We are working closely across the Scottish Government and external stakeholders to agree the most appropriate form and structure for the NSWA, linking closely with all elements of the NCS. The intention is to have a Shadow NSWA established by spring 2025 and to be fully operational by spring 2026

■ **We will take forward a redesign of the Children's Hearings System, building on the recommendations from the review led by Sheriff Mackie, with the aim to bring forward any required legislation by the end of the Parliamentary session.**

The Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) was established by The Promise Scotland in the summer of 2021 to consider the redesign of the current Children's Hearings System in order to keep The Promise. The group was independent of the Scottish Government, chaired by Sheriff David Mackie, and with membership from Children's Hearings Scotland, The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, and The Promise Scotland.

The HSWG published its final report on 25 May 2023. The report contains 130+ recommendations covering a broad range of policy areas relating to care systems, children's hearings, youth justice, legal representation, access to justice, and preventative support for families amongst others.

The Scottish Government published its **response** to the Hearings System Working Group's report on 21 December 2023. This response accepts, or agrees to consider further, the majority of recommendations made in the report.

A Children's Hearings Redesign Board has now been established, consisting of senior leadership from the key statutory organisations responsible for the delivery of the children's hearings system. This group will be responsible for the governance and oversight of all non-legislative aspects of the redesign of the children's hearings system. The group met for the first time in January 2024, and is progressing work to develop plans and priorities across 2024 and 2025. A planning sub-group consisting of operational leads from the statutory bodies has also been established to take forward actions emanating from the Children's Hearings Redesign Board.

A public consultation on legislative aspects of Children's Hearings Redesign was launched on 26 July 2024.

- **We will support The Promise Scotland to develop a blueprint for the creation and control of, and access to, information about people with care experience which will empower people to decide how and when key information about them is made available.**

The Promise Scotland will report on this work in summer 2024 and will examine how protocols with key institutions can support provision of the right information at the right time. It will consider the National Digital record as proposed in regulations as part of the National Care Service Bill.

In support of this work the Data for Children Collaborative are leading work to draw on expertise in information sharing, data governance, engagement and systems design to help shape a solution to the management of personal information.

The output of this when published, will inform the connection of children and young people's data to wider activity as part of the National Care Service response. It will also open opportunity to include any additional legislative changes as part of the proposed Promise Bill.

- **We will support The Promise Scotland to scope a national lifelong advocacy service for people and families with care experience.**

Since 2022, The Promise Scotland have undertaken and completed work to scope a national lifelong advocacy service for care experienced people and families with care experience. The outcome of this work was submitted in a report to Ministers in December 2023, and was **published** on The Promise Scotland website in February 2024.

In developing this report, The Promise Scotland engaged with advocacy providers, building on the voices and experiences heard by the Independent Care Review to make a series of recommendations on how a lifelong advocacy service could be operationalised. The report presents four phases of activity proposed to move this forward and calls on a collaborative approach across advocacy providers, experts, and children, adults and families with care experience to help achieve this.

- Phase One: Agreeing the core principles of an advocacy service
- Phase Two: Creating a National Strategy for advocacy provision
- Phase Three: Expanding the National Practice Model
- Phase Four: An approach for adults and families with care experience

Complementary to the work undertaken by The Promise Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland have undertaken a review of their experience and learning from providing an advocacy service and have shared findings in a separate report.

The Scottish Government welcomes the recommendations presented in both reports, and they are informing wider activity on advocacy provision within the developing National Care Service model and implementation of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as areas with existing, long established, models of advocacy provision, such as the Childrens Hearings Advocacy National Practice Model, and how a potential approach to lifelong advocacy could be progressed within this broader landscape.

Moving forward, further engagement with advocacy providers will be critical to the next stages of development of an approach to lifelong advocacy. In support of this, The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise will convene and chair a stakeholder panel with advocacy providers, and other key partners, to progress the recommendations and identify the appropriate next steps to be taken.

As this work is progressed, there is an opportunity to amplify and promote access to existing advocacy services for people with care experience.

■ **We will develop a delivery plan for our work to embed and sustain trauma-informed workforces and services in the coming year.**

The National Trauma Transformation Programme (previously called the National Trauma Training Programme) provides accessible, evidence-based trauma training resources and support for implementation. There is a renewed shared ambition with COSLA for a trauma-informed workforce and services with the launch of a National Trauma Transformational Programme and new website.

Work continues with COSLA, the Improvement Service, Resilience Learning Partnership, and NHS National Education Scotland to support organisations to develop and implement trauma-informed approaches to their workforces and via their services.

Trauma-informed social work services are progressing in collaboration with key partners through the Trauma Responsive Social Work Services Programme (TRSWS). Delivery of the implementation support and learning programme commenced in October 2023, initially with four local authorities across children's, justice and adult social work services and workforce (Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership, Scottish Borders Council, Stirling Council, and West Lothian Council). Initial learning from these sites will help inform scheduling, with further areas across Scotland to be supported by the team from 2024 until December 2026.

The team has delivered Trauma Skilled Practice training and follow up support to over 200 newly qualified and early career social workers across Scotland. The team will review learning and offer this learning and support to an additional minimum 200 newly qualified social workers this calendar year. We will work with key partners through the Social Work Education Partnership to consider how best to embed this learning into the first year of social work practice.

The TRSWS team is also trialling trauma skilled practice learning in undergraduate social work education.

■ **We will introduce a Promise Bill to make any further legislative changes required to keep The Promise by the end of this Parliamentary session.**

The Promise Bill will make any further legislative changes required to keep The Promise. This may include, for example, provisions required to implement the adopted or adapted recommendations in respect of children's hearings redesign, and bring forward guidance that requires to be put on a statutory footing to make sure that public authorities do what is necessary to keep The Promise.

We will continue to work with partners including The Promise Scotland and COSLA to identify areas where legislative change may support delivery of The Promise.

■ **We will establish The Promise Collective co-chaired with The Promise Scotland and COSLA to support alignment and cohesion of activities.**

The Promise Collective was established in 2022 with an aim to align the improvement work underway across the system. A key element of this is to connect and provide a route for joint working and ambition by linking research and evidence to practice and policy.

The group is co-chaired by The Promise Scotland, COSLA and The Scottish Government. Membership includes CELCIS, Who Cares? Scotland and the Improvement Service. The focus of the group has progressed over the two year period to consider the development and agreement of core aims, methods and measures for joint monitoring and reporting of progress. This joint working has been supported by the Verity House Agreement.

In 2024, The Promise Collective has widened further to bring together the work of organisations including, the Care Inspectorate, Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and

Rescue Service to embed The Promise aims into improvement work across agencies.

The Promise Collective provides a strong framework of partnership working and sharing of information and activity underway across organisations to monitor and report progress. This includes connecting activities through corporate parenting duties; sharing of information and best practice to support improvement activity; and identifying opportunities for further joint working and collaboration.

■ **We will collaborate with The Promise Scotland to scope a new, holistic framework for governance and accountability of social care services**

The Promise is clear that if Scotland is to shift its practice to support, prioritise and nurture relationships, then we must shift our accountability structures. Part of this relates to inspection. We are committed to ensuring regulation and scrutiny centres on listening to children about how they are cared for, their ability to thrive and measures the things that matter to children, young people and their families.

The Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation of Social Care in Scotland (IRISR), chaired by Dame Sue Bruce, and engaging with The Promise Scotland, considered how regulation and inspection of social care support and linked services can ensure a human rights-based approach that delivers improved outcomes for people.

The IRISR Recommendation Report was published on 27th September 2023 and made 38 high level strategic recommendations. The Scottish Government response to the IRISR Recommendation Report was published on 6th March 2024, accepting all 38 recommendations, recognising that significant amounts of work are already underway that will in part or fully address a number of the recommendations.

To ensure the recommendations are implemented in a way envisaged by the IRISR implementation will be phased, and work has already commenced two new workstreams focused on recommendations 15 and 33. We have established a programme of work that will enable us to track progress for current and future work to progress the recommendations.

We will continue to work closely and collaboratively with regulators, providers, partners and with those who have lived and living experience of social care support and linked services in all aspects of this work.

The Promise Scotland was directly engaged in the Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny

& Regulation including representation on the Practitioner and Stakeholder Panel, one of two panels providing specialist advice to the Chair to inform recommendations. In recognising that inspection and regulation form one part of a wider governance and accountability framework The Promise Scotland will publish a report in 2024 on resetting public services and the governance and accountability changes require to keep The Promise. The paper will set out recommendations for changes to unlock the power of everyone working with children, young people, and their families with care experience to improve their lives. It will propose a different approach, one which changes behaviours, leadership, how we scrutinise and inspect, and our ways of working.



Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support and Support For Our Children, Young People and Adults with care experience

As set out in The Promise Implementation Plan in 2022, our overarching ambition is to keep families together where that is safe and to provide the support that is needed to enable this to happen. In turn this will support our main aim that by 2030 we will have reduced the number of children in care and those in care will report a positive care experience

Actions that have, and continue to be, progressed under this ambition recognise the importance of early experiences, including pre-birth and infancy, and how these are critical to determining wellbeing throughout childhood into adult life. The support available to families during these stages is a crucial part of the ongoing impact that early experiences will have on a child's life. We know that the improved outcomes we can achieve for those children who are diverted from the care system include better educational attainment, better health and reduced likelihood of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health and offending behaviour.

Where our children, young people and adults have care experience, it is crucial that the right support is available to them across services such as education, health and employment, and that these actions are underpinned by our national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people, Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC), and our aims to improve outcomes for adults with care experience.

Investing in Whole Family Support

We must recognise the network around our children and young people, and the role and impact that they have in shaping their experiences and outcomes into adulthood. Holistic support aims to address the needs of families at the time of need rather than at crisis point, helping families to flourish and reduce the chances of a family

engaging the care system, and children potentially entering care.

The vision for holistic whole family support is that support will be readily available to families that need it, where and when they need it. This will enable us to move towards our ambition to keep The Promise, and for Scotland's children to only know care, compassion, and love.

Further detail on our investment approach with Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, and work to shift towards early intervention and prevention is outlined in **Part 4**.

Access To Financial Advice

Access to the right financial advice can lead to income maximisation, lower bills, access to employment opportunities and housing support, in addition to wider wellbeing support. In 2022, we set out a commitment to invest £10 million over the term of this Parliament to increase access to advice services in accessible settings, through Welfare and Health Partnerships and other health settings, to maximise incomes, tackle the poverty penalty and improve wellbeing.

Since then, a total of £2.5 million has been committed to the Advice in Accessible Settings Fund which is delivered by Advice UK. In 2024-25 this is supporting 32 partnerships delivering debt, welfare, and income maximisation advice in health, community, and education settings. From July 2023 to June 2024 over £7.5 million of financial gains were recorded providing support to over 5,500 people. Over £700,000 of those financial gains were directly related to children, for school meal vouchers, Educational Maintenance Allowance, Scottish Child Payment, school clothing grants, and charitable grants from children's charities.

Along with investment in the Welfare Advice Health Partnerships there is now significant accessible financial advice available across Scotland. Progress on the impact that this is having on families will be monitored through regular reporting.

Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention (CYPFEI) Fund, Adult Learning and Empowering Communities (ALEC) Fund

CYPFEI & ALEC has provided over £106m core funding to 115 organisations since 2016 to deliver support that tackles inequalities, child and family poverty, improve learning and build skills across Scotland by supporting third sector organisations who work with children and families to ensure that sustained, high quality support is available. The Promise is embedded as one of the main focuses and key policy priorities in the fund by way of supporting organisations who are providing services to young people and their families with care experience.

In March 2023, Ministers took the decision to extend all existing funding under CYPFEI and ALEC for two financial years, providing £29m to 115 organisations to end of March 2025.

The Promise Partnership Fund

The Promise Partnership Fund (PPF) was launched in February 2021 as a transformational change fund for organisations to begin to take steps towards implementing The Promise and thereby improve the lives of children and young people with care experience and families on the edges of care.

The Corra Foundation administer the fund on the Scottish Government's behalf and Ministers publicly committed £4m per annum to the PPF until 2025.

Criteria for funding rounds are set by an Advisory Group and applications are assessed by a Decision Maker's Panel which includes members with lived experience of the care system.

The fund has provided support to over 100 organisations and local authorities across Scotland across five funding rounds, with specific focus on:

- Supporting the care sector to change internal infrastructure and culture
- Organisations who are leading the way with change
- Supporting change to help ensure that brothers and sisters stay together and connected
- Relationships/Moving On and Youth Justice
- Workforce/Supportive School Structures/Youth Justice Rights

The organisations supported range from third sector organisations, local authorities, including Health and Social Care Partnerships and NHS Boards, Universities and Police Scotland. A number of the projects involve collaboration across sectors and organisations and show how joint working can lead to wider change.

Funding has been committed to The Promise Partnership Fund for 2024/25 and the Scottish Government will work with the Corra Foundation to carry out a comprehensive review of the fund, including the impact the funded projects have had in keeping The Promise.

This will include the significant steps that have been taken forward, but will also acknowledge the barriers that organisations have faced in making the necessary shifts.

Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships & Money Talk Team

Since 2021, the Scottish Government has invested over £4 million in a ‘test and learn’ programme through Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHP), supporting people to access advice in up to 180 GP Practices across Scotland, with 150 targeted in the most deprived communities and 30 in remote, rural and island settings.

Through the initiative, embedded welfare rights advisors can provide regulated and accredited advice on a number of issues including social security entitlement, income maximisation, debt resolution, and employability. The objective of this funding has been to understand and demonstrate the effectiveness and positive impacts of this accessible advice model and to encourage participating local authorities and health and social care partnerships to consider this model of advice provision.

Following successful completion of the ‘test and learn’ phase, the Scottish Government is seeking to support participating local authorities, through continued investment, to mainstream the WAHPs model over the medium-term.

A new, streamlined Money Talk Team service is now being delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland. The new funding arrangement brings together three previously separate funding streams into one grant agreement. The new service incorporates income maximisation, welfare and specialist debt advice delivered through one national website and telephone number as well as the CAB network of local bureaux. The service continues to provide holistic household financial advice across Scotland. The most recent progress report for April-December 2023 recorded that almost 36,000 clients had been supported, including almost 8,000 from Tackling Child Poverty priority family groups. Total client gains reached over £23 million and for priority family groups, this totalled over £6 million.

Supporting Families To Stay Together

The Scottish Government is progressing actions to support early years and under 5s through two major programmes: **Early Child Development Transformational Change Programme**, and **Early Learning and Childcare**.

We know that the experiences that children have during their early years and parents’ capacity to provide nurturing care lays lifelong foundations for health and life skills during the period from pre-birth to three, when the brain and metabolic and immune systems develop fastest, laying the foundations for life. The programme builds on significant investment and support and renews our focus on improving early child development by bringing together a programme of work to: provide oversight and better integration of the policies that contribute to early child development with a focus

on prevention; re-emphasise the importance of pre-birth and early years across all policy, and; identify any policy and implementation gaps, informed by current evidence areas (including what is needed pre-conception) and build collaboration across the whole system to address them.

Scotland’s **Universal Health Visiting Pathway** offers support to all of Scotland’s young families from pre-birth until a child starts school. Where additional input is required, the pathway provides a gateway to other levels of Health Visiting provision and referrals to more specialised healthcare services. Health Boards are directed to deploy more health visitors to areas of socioeconomic deprivation. This allows health visitors more capacity to help those most in need. For young, first-time parents, the Family Nurse Partnership programme is provided pre-birth until their child reaches two.

Up to 4,000 families per year are supported by the **Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)**, and over 13,000 have benefitted since the programme began in 2010. We are working with NHS Boards to widen the eligibility criteria so more people can benefit. First time mothers under 20, and first time mothers aged under the age of 25, with care experience will be offered FNP services by the end of 2024. This expansion will support up to an additional 500 families per year.

Perinatal and infant mental health. The Promise provides a continued thread in our delivery, reflecting the ongoing need to support infants, children, young people and families with their mental health and wellbeing. This work is now progressing through a Joint Strategic Board for Child and Family Mental Health (JSB) led by COSLA and the Scottish Government.

The Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge was published in 2023 and supports the recognition and understanding of the voice of all infants. There are currently 13 health boards in Scotland with new Infant Mental Health (IMH) services. To support this the Perinatal Mental Health Network Scotland have published an IMH Service Development Guide and role descriptors for Parent-Infant Therapists. This sits alongside other statutory services supporting perinatal and infant mental health (Mother and Baby Unit, specialist Community Perinatal Mental Health Teams, and Maternity & Neonatal Psychological Interventions. In addition, third sector provision for infants, parents and carers is supported via the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health 2024 Third Sector Fund.

Our ongoing support to every family across Scotland is continued through our national and universal programmes designed to give children the best possible start, including **Baby Box**; **Bookbug**; and our targeted **PlayTalkRead** programme, supporting parents and carers to develop positive relationships, form attachment and bond with their child from day one. The **Best Start** programme for maternal and neonatal services in Scotland provides a continuity of carer for women with the most complex needs, developing trusting relationships throughout their pregnancy and birth. Building on the 2013 Play Strategy for Scotland, we will publish a Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2024-2030, which will reflect The Promise, before the end of 2024.

Work continues to ensure that all children with care experience receive a **health assessment**, within 28 days of the Health Board being notified. This includes work across the health service to identify who is best placed to carry out these assessments, and to refresh the guidance to support any gaps in implementation. We have continued to engage with Health Boards and Health & Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) in respect of the delivery of initial health assessments for looked after children with a view to identifying opportunities for improving health assessment delivery and the health outcomes of children with care experience.

Aberlour Perinatal Service

In November 2023 the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise visited Aberlour Intensive Perinatal Support Service in Falkirk where she heard from staff and parents who are being supported by the service.

Aberlour's Perinatal Befriending Service is a non-clinical and community-based service for women experiencing perinatal mental health difficulties, providing emotional and practical support through pregnancy and during their baby's first year. Delivered across Forth Valley, the model is an early intervention approach for mothers/mothers to be with mild to moderate perinatal mental health illnesses.

The service is peer led, is asset based and person centred. Volunteer Befrienders are there to listen, not to judge, to support, not diagnose and just be there to help women build the confidence to enable them to reconnect and build new connections that will endure beyond service support.

After building trusting relationships with Perinatal Coordinators through home visits, assessment and therapeutic conversations, new/expectant mothers are matched with a highly trained and supported Befriender and choose when, where and how they would like to receive their befriending support (2-3 hours) on a weekly basis.

Early Learning and Childcare

The Scottish Government is committed to providing high quality, flexible early learning and childcare that is accessible and affordable for all families. Our Early Learning and Childcare work maintains this focus on our ambition to ensure that all children get the best possible start in life.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 ensures our children in care are able to access funded early learning and childcare from age two. From August 2021, the provision of funded early learning and childcare for two-year olds was extended to include children of parents with care experience. Importantly, once a child qualifies for early learning and childcare, they stay qualified. Building on what we have learned from the 1140 programme for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds, our work to develop future funded offers of early learning and childcare will be strongly aligned to our approach to Whole Family Wellbeing and Holistic Family Support.



Delivering An Education System That Supports Our Children And Young People with care experience

Closing the gap between the educational outcomes of children with care experience and all children is a key part of how we keep The Promise. We want all of our children to experience an education system where they feel supported to thrive and have opportunities to develop and gain qualifications and experiences which will help them onwards in their journey through life and into positive destinations. However, we know that children and young people with care experience are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes than other children and young people. This includes during their time at school – when they are more likely to experience exclusion and have lower attendance – as well as when their time at school is coming to an end, when they are less likely to achieve qualifications compared to other children.

In our 2022 Implementation Plan we acknowledged that we must work together to change this. We have, and continue to work collectively to make change happen for our children and young people with care experience. Our approach is rights based, in line with implementation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and person centred as we aim to Get it right for every child, understanding and nurturing their needs to enable them to flourish and reach their full potential.

Education Scotland are working across the wider education system to identify the actions required for practitioners, educational settings and local authorities to implement: The Promise, the Additional Support for Learning Implementation Review, and incorporation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, within the framework of the getting it right for every child.

Work is ongoing with partners, including Education Scotland, COSLA, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, and CELCIS to progress the development of a **Promise In Education Framework**. This framework focusses on improving the educational outcomes of children and young people with care experience, including:

- Increased attendance and reduced exclusion
- Improved staying on rates
- Improving achievement and attainment and
- Sustaining positive destinations upon leaving school.

The Promise in Education Framework recognises the correlation between educational outcomes to increase attendance and reduced exclusion, improved staying on rates, improving achievement and attainment, and sustaining positive destinations upon leaving school. The framework aims to build on actions already being taken across Scotland's education system to keep The Promise and will be integral to The Promise Progress Framework, further detail on which is set out in **Part 5**.

Education Reform

Education reform includes the reform of the approach to assessment and qualifications, and the overall delivery of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Implementation Framework, including re-assessing the vision for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and improvements to curriculum delivery and measurement of impact.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills gave an update to Parliament in November 2023, and set out the priority of ensuring reform is right for our system and creates change in practice and culture. This update highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to reform across the Education and Skills system and the creation of a new Centre for Teaching Excellence.

We are making progress on reform, with a revised governance and delivery model now implemented across the Education and Skills portfolio. We are working to establish a new agency for Scottish education, a new independent inspectorate, and a new qualifications body. We are working with teachers, practitioners, and others involved in delivering education day in, day out across the

full range of settings, listening to the voices and views of children, young people and all those experiencing education. The next steps of the reform work are:

- Agreement of transitional governance arrangements for the new Qualifications Body the New Agency and New Inspectorate.
- The analysis of the consultation on the proposed Education Bill for New Qualifications Body and Independent Inspectorate was published in June 2024.
- Curriculum Improvement Cycle to commence.
- Co Design work for Centre for Teaching Excellence to commence (spring 2024).
- School Education Digital Strategy to be developed (late 2024).

Attainment

The Scottish Attainment Challenge is about achieving equity in educational outcomes, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Education Scotland Attainment Advisers have a responsibility to report, through their tri-annual reports, on progress towards improving attainment of children and young people with care experience. Attainment Advisers also provide advice and support to local authorities in terms of interventions and practice to improve educational outcomes.

The Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Fund is a targeted resource provided to local authorities to support children and young people with care experience from birth to the age of 26. The funding is provided to local authorities and aims to improve the educational outcomes and experiences for children and young people with care experience, supported by the strategic goals of The Promise and the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

In 2022/23, £10.9m was provided to local authorities through the Fund to help improve the wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and young people with care experience from birth to the age of 26.

In January 2024, the first tranche of funding for the 2023/24 academic term was paid to local authorities totalling £7m, enabling additional support to be provided to children and young people with care experience. The second tranche of payments covering the 2023/24 academic term will be paid in June bringing the total across the year to £10.5m. Allocations for 2024/25 will be calculated following the publication of the Childrens Social Work Statistics Scotland: 2022 to 2023. They will be communicated to local authorities in the new academic term.

To date CECYP funding has supported progress in areas such as attainment, attendance, engagement and exclusions, including through the expansion of the Virtual Schools and Head Teacher Network, delivery of a range of mentoring programmes, improvements in tracking and monitoring of educational progress and outcomes of CECYP, and the introduction of a wide range of tailored and targeted supports in educational settings.

Many local authorities are using data to track measures and in turn target resources and interventions in ways that will have the greatest impact on supporting care experienced children and young people.

Progress has been made in educational attainment, in 2010, there was a 63.9 percentage point difference between the proportion of looked after school leavers who achieved at least 1 qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher, compared to all children. This meant that while over 3 quarters (77.1%) of all school leavers were achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher, just 13.9% of children who were looked after in their final year at school achieved the same.

In the following 10 years up to 2020 when The Promise was made, this percentage point gap had narrowed to 47.6 percentage points, and nearly 2

in 5 pupils who were looked after in their final year were achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher.

Just 2 years later in 2022, this gap has fallen again to 40.3 percentage points, meaning that nearly half (46.1%) of school leavers who were looked after in their final year at school achieved at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or higher.

Exclusions

The Promise called for an end to the exclusion of children and young people with care experience. Our position continues to be that exclusion should be a last resort where there is no appropriate alternative. Local authorities continue to be encouraged to focus on maximising attendance and engagement in learning by applying the **'Included, Engaged and Involved' guidance** as a way of mitigating against the need for exclusion.

Scotland's Virtual School Head Teachers and Care Experienced Teams Network (VSHT) was established by CELCIS. The aim is to support and connect those working in Virtual School Head Teacher roles, share good practice and drive progress towards better educational experiences for all children and young people with care experience. The network has an Exclusions working group specifically looking at common practice across local authorities: things that are working well, challenges, and identifying effective alternatives to exclusion.

The Scottish Government continues to provide £100,000 annual funding to enable CELCIS to support the continued facilitation of the Virtual School Head Teacher network. There are currently 18 Virtual Head Teachers (or equivalent) who are members of the network with a standing offer of support to other local authorities who are considering implementing the role. The network has also been expanded to include two Attainment Advisers from Education Scotland to offer additional support to the network and virtual head teachers.

Keeping The Promise Award

Scottish Government have co-developed a keeping The Promise Award Programme for individual practitioners and educational establishments. This Professional Learning Programme has been designed at 3 levels: individuals, the *I Promise Badge*, and Educational Establishments the *We Promise Award* and the *keeping The Promise Award*. The Keeping The Promise Award is for settings who can demonstrate that their actions and approaches are having a positive impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of children with care experience and their families.

The Award Programme was formally launched in March 2024. The full Award requires Educational Establishments and local authorities to provide evidence of the impact of any changes they have made that supports the educational experience and outcomes of learners with care experience. In 2024/25 we will begin to collate this evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, to provide 'Stories of Change'.

The keeping The Promise Award resources are now published on the Education Scotland website: <https://education.gov.scot/resources/keeping-the-promise-award-programme/>

In June 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills convened the first meeting of a **Headteacher Taskforce** which focused on school exclusions. The topic of school exclusions has also been covered across a series of behaviour summits held between September and November last year. The final summit coincided with the publication of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) which provides a robust national picture in relation to behaviour in Scotland's schools.

This work is being developed into a multi-year plan to tackle instances of challenging behaviour, working with local authorities, trade unions and others. We are working with the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools

(SAGRABIS) to establish what actions are required to respond to the findings of the summit process and BISSR. It is intended that the plan will include actions relating to supporting attendance, and towards creating safe and consistent environments in schools, through improved guidance and support on relationship approaches, consequences, and exclusion. The national action plan was published in August 2024.

There have been huge reductions in the number of exclusions looked after pupils experience since 2013. Children who were looked after within the 2012/13 school year experienced nearly 8 and a half times the number of school exclusions for every 1,000 pupils (280), compared to just 33 for all pupils.

By the 2022/23 school year, the number of exclusions experienced by all pupils had fallen significantly, with there being 97 exclusions per 1,000 looked after pupils, and 17 for every 1,000 pupils in the overall pupil population.

Whilst we have seen an increase in exclusion rates compared to 2 years ago, it is important to note that this is 36% lower than in 2019, the last time these figures were not affected by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further & Higher Education

We know that attaining a good level of education can lead to good outcomes such as good health, employment opportunities and more, which is why we are committed to ensuring that children and young people with care experience have the opportunity to gain a positive educational experience to help them succeed.

To support learning and address potential unfairness in the system, people with care experience are guaranteed an offer of an undergraduate place at a Scottish university, providing they meet the access threshold.

In 2023/24 academic year the **Care Experienced Bursary (CEB)** was increased to £9,000. This is a non-income assessed, non-repayable grant available to eligible Scottish domiciled students in full-time Further or Higher Education at college or university who have been in care by a local authority in the UK, before turning 18. It was first introduced in the 2017/18 academic year when 545 full-time undergraduate students received the bursary.

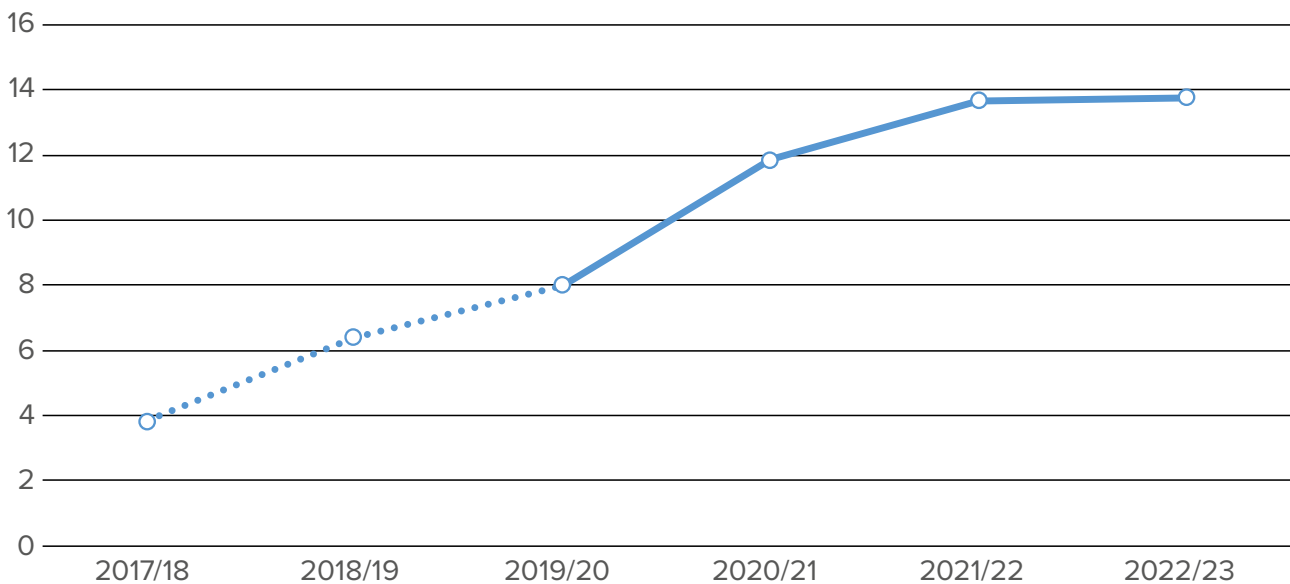
Eligible students in receipt of the higher education CEB can choose whether to receive their payments over term time, usually 9 months, or over the full year. The total bursary of £9,000 will remain the same. The 12 month option offers the added benefit for students to have their financial support spread evenly throughout the year to help budget over the summer months.

In the 2022/23 academic year, £13.8 million was awarded to pupils via the care experienced bursary, benefiting 1,840 full time students.



Chart 8: Amount (£ million) awarded through the Care Experienced Bursary

Amount (£ million) awarded per academic year through the Care Experienced Bursary, 2017/18 – 2022/23.



From academic year 2024/25 the Scottish Government will introduce a £2,400 increase to the main undergraduate student support package in the form of a **Special Support Loan**. This uplift will bring the support we offer students in line with the living wage. This also means that students with care experience, estranged students and those from the lowest household incomes can access funds up to £11,400. By introducing this uplift as a Special Support Loan will mean that those students who remain entitled to welfare benefits whilst they study can access this additional support without any further reduction in their benefit entitlement.

A **Summer Accommodation Grant** to eligible students with care experience in Higher Education who need help with their accommodation costs during the summer period is also available.

Hub for Success

In February 2024, the then First Minister visited students and staff at the Hub for Success. Supported by Napier University and hosted by the University of Edinburgh, the Hub offers people with care experience impartial, one-to-one support to help people get in, stay in, or return to education.

The Hub for Success received grant funding through The Promise Partnership fund to support the establishment of a Strategic Lead Manager role for one year to push forward the development and consolidation of the hub model to transform support experience for students with care experience of all ages providing an accessible, seamless and easy to navigate pathway into further and higher education. They are now working to expand collaboration between colleges, universities and local authorities outwith the current regional model for Hub for Success.

Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS)

The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government which administers financial support to Scottish domiciled students studying a course of Higher Education in the UK.

Since the 2017/18 Academic Year (AY), SAAS have been administering a bespoke bursary for students with care experience. Beyond the financial support available, SAAS have introduced a number of measures over the years to support our care experienced cohort.

The decision was taken at the outset to only ask students to provide evidence of their care experience once regardless of the number of times that the student applied for Higher Education funding.

A bespoke form has been developed that students can use as supporting evidence for their funding application. This form was created in conjunction with stakeholders who support students with care experience and students themselves to ensure a trauma informed approach to evidencing eligibility. In addition, as access to the Care Experienced Bursary is not restricted by age, SAAS have ensured that the supporting documentation is reflective of historical types of care that some students may have experienced during their lifetime. All of these applications are routed through a specialist team within the Agency who have all undertaken trauma informed practice training.

The SAAS website has a dedicated section for our students and those that support them which provides information on funding, application process and additional help and advice which is available **Support for Care Experienced students – SAAS**. SAAS work with schools, colleges, universities and third sector organisations across Scotland on this work.

Employability and Creating Opportunity

In creating a Scotland that is a fair and equal society, we must continue to create greater equity and opportunity for our young people and adults with care experience. We must continue to increase access to employment, training and support, all of which will, in turn, contribute to our ambitions on productivity growth and wellbeing.

Many Local Employability Partnerships are prioritising supported employment, education and training programmes for young people with care experience, which also includes strengthening the voice of care leavers in local service design. Employer Recruitment Incentives are available to support those furthest away from the labour market, including those who have been in the care system.

The **Developing the Young Workforce** programme enhances provision for young people with care

experience in schools. This includes via School Coordinators supporting every mainstream secondary school in Scotland and via our partnership with MCR Pathways and Career Ready, to provide mentors for young people across Scotland.

The **Discovering Your Potential** employability programme, which is a partnership between Action for Children, Barnardos, and the Prince's Trust, provides flexible and intensive support for care leavers, who face multiple barriers to accessing positive destinations.

Additional funding is provided to Inspiring Scotland to deliver **Our Future Now**, an employability programme aimed at young people who are facing significant barriers, including those with care experience.

We recognise the value of lifelong learning. In December 2023, the Minister for Higher and Further Education and Minister for Veterans

announced an Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision across Scotland. This announcement followed on from the publication of the **Adult Learning Strategy** in 2022. This will develop our understanding of the impact and outcomes for some of Scotland's most and marginalised groups. The Review is expected to provide recommendations to Scottish Ministers this summer.

Modern Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are vital for supporting our young people into valuable rewarding careers and this is why our funding contributions for Modern Apprentices are weighted towards young people, particularly the 16-19 age group, with enhanced funding contributions for those with care experience up to age 29.

This acknowledges that young people with care experience may have a longer transition into work and may require additional support from their training provider to complete their apprenticeship.

Since 2015/16, published statistics show that 0.9% of Modern Apprentices self-reported as care experienced. This has increased to 2.3% in 2023/24. Skills Development Scotland continue to work with training providers and stakeholders to improve self-reporting and to simplify the eligibility criteria and process for claiming Enhanced Funding.

Uptake of the number of care experienced Modern Apprentices (MA) can be monitored through the official Modern Apprenticeship Statistics which are published quarterly by Skills Development Scotland. **Modern Apprenticeships statistics – Skills Development Scotland.**

Tackling Inequality and Supporting Our Communities

We know that the places we live, the communities we live within and the environment that surrounds us can have a profound impact on our lives. We know also that our most disadvantaged

communities have higher levels of crime, poorer health outcomes and increased levels of alcohol and drug use. To make real changes that really make a difference we need to understand the circumstances of people's lives. That means taking a person centred, place based approach which starts and ends with individual stories in real places.

We are also maintaining our **Delivering Equally Safe Fund**, which is providing support to a number of organisations working with children and young people affected by gender-based violence. Over the 2 year life-span of the fund, we are providing over £3.4 million to 12 organisations solely working with children and young people. Delivering Equally Safe funding will run until March 2025, which is an extension to the original timelines to enable stability to services whilst an independent review of funding is undertaken.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

In taking a preventative approach to mental health the importance of relationships, stability and a non-stigmatising engagement is key. The timely and consistent availability of support before crisis point and available for parents and carers at all stages of their parenting journey can aid nurtured caring relationships and help keep families together.

In November 2023, The Scottish Government published the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan (2023-25)**. One of the priorities is to reduce the risk of poor mental health and wellbeing in adult life by promoting the importance of good relationships and trauma-informed approaches from the earliest years of life, taking account where relevant adverse childhood experiences. The Delivery Plan commits to funding the enhancement of crisis and distress services, including trauma-informed support, for children and young people, giving particular consideration to the needs of children and young people with care experience or on the edges of care.

Suicide Prevention

Scotland's 3-year Suicide Prevention **Action Plan Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention action plan 2022 to 2025 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)** (owned by Scottish Government and COSLA) contains our commitment to work with The Promise Scotland to engage with people with care experience to better understand what action is needed to embed suicide prevention activity in our support to children and young people in care, and care leavers.

The Action Plan is part of our 10-year suicide prevention Strategy **Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention strategy 2022 to 2032 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)** – which is considered world leading due to it: focusing on outcomes and tackling the inequalities of suicide, prioritising supporting groups at higher risk of suicide, and taking a whole of government and society approach to suicide prevention.

Our vision is to reduce the number of suicide deaths in Scotland, whilst tackling the inequalities which contribute to suicide. As a government, we are keenly focused on reaching and supporting people who are at higher risk of suicide because of the inequalities they face, for example, people who are affected by poverty, homelessness or with care experience.

Our suicide prevention approach prioritises communities who are impacted by discrimination, stigma, inequality and wider social determinants of suicide. We are collaborating with a range of third sector equalities partners who represent people in these communities, including care experience, to deepen our understanding of the challenges they face, so that we can build more effective suicide prevention responses.

This engagement began in late 2023. It will be important to continue to work in a co-production space with these partners, and importantly to listen to the experience of people with lived experience, as we design and deliver tailored

approaches, closely working with third sector partners. The care experienced community will be prioritised through this work.

Using data is critical to informing our suicide prevention approach, and as part of our data improvement work we are putting in place a multi-agency suicide review and learning system. This will allow us to access valuable demographic data and an understanding of the circumstances surrounding a suicide death, including capturing information about adults with care experience. The suicide reviews will support local and national service redesign as part of our suicide prevention work. We are also working with the Child Death Hub to ensure any learning on suicide through this process is shared at local and national levels.

As part of this work, we are undertaking research with our Academic Advisory Group around effective interventions for children and young people to identify effective interventions within key settings, such as education and youth work, and to gain a better understanding of help seeking and help giving. This work aims to inform known data gaps about suicide rates/ risks in the care experienced community.

The Scottish Government's work on suicide prevention is being progressed through an innovative delivery vehicle (Suicide Prevention Scotland) to drive delivery of our action plan. This is a partnership-led delivery model which we consider key to connecting national, local and sectoral partners together in our shared mission to prevent suicide. This partnership seeks to share resource, expertise and learning so we can work across organisational and sector boundaries to extend our reach and impact in preventing suicide. We have plans to deepen our engagement with partners working in the care experienced field as part of this partnership model.

We have created a new advisory group (the National Suicide Prevention Advisory Group) to provide strategic advice to Scottish Government and COSLA, as well as Suicide Prevention

Scotland, on ensuring our delivery is achieving the strategy's outcomes. Membership of our National Suicide Prevention Advisory Group reflects the complexity of suicide and includes many partners who are working to address the social determinants of suicides such as poverty, as well as higher risk groups. The Chief Executive of Who Cares? Scotland is a member of the Group.

Lived experience plays a central role in shaping our suicide prevention work. Our Youth Advisory Group (which is a lived experience group of children and young people affected by suicide) includes young people with care experience. This is helping ensure our work best supports people with care experience.

Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan

In November 2023, the Scottish Government and COSLA published the world's first standalone self-harm strategy Self harm strategy and action plan 2023 to 2027.

We made this decision because evidence shows that the majority of people who self-harm are not suicidal and if we only focus on self-harm through the lens of suicide prevention, we risk losing an opportunity to support a wider group of people, including many children and young people, who are in distress, but who are not suicidal.

We know that self-harm is complex and is often used by people as a way to cope with difficult, traumatic, or distressing feelings and experiences. It can affect anyone but evidence suggests that it is more prevalent among young women and other marginalised groups. Our action plan prioritises support for people who are at higher risk of self-harm, including people with care experience.

The strategy and action plan were shaped at every step of the way by people with lived experience of self-harm and those who work in services that support them. This included the views of children and young people who may face greater barriers

in accessing support. Based on this feedback our action plan focuses on three priority areas; to deepen knowledge and compassionate understanding of self-harm, to continue to build person-centred support and services, and to review, improve and share data and evidence. Research confirms that many people do not come forward for help for fear of stigma or discrimination and tackling this sits at the heart of our vision, which is for people who have self-harmed or are at risk of self-harm, to receive compassionate, recovery-focuses support, without fear of stigma or discrimination.

Over the last three years, we have invested £1.5m in the development of bespoke self-harm support services through Self-Harm Network Scotland (SHNS), run by Penumbra. We have committed a further £1.5m for the delivery of the action plan, including the continuation of these vital services for 2024-2026.

SHNS provides free peer and online support to anyone aged 12 and over across Scotland who is affected by self-harm. There is a webchat service that operates 7 days a week between 6pm-10pm that is staffed by peer practitioners and trained volunteers who can offer immediate, compassionate, out of hours support.

Furthermore, SHNS can provide free self-harm training for professionals working with someone who has self-harmed and anyone else interested in learning more. Most recently SHNS have launched group support sessions for loved ones of people who self-harm.

As part of the implementation of the action plan we will be working closely with SHNS and other key partners to ensure that resources, support and learning opportunities are co-designed with people with lived experience to ensure they meet the needs of marginalised communities and groups at higher risk of self-harm including children and adults with care experience.

Violence Reduction

The Violence Prevention Framework was published in May 2023. Implementation of the Framework includes activity to identify opportunities to intervene earlier to reduce and prevent harm by those who have been, or are at risk of being, care experienced. The development of the Framework has been informed by engagement with various partner organisations and existing research and evidence on non-sexual violence. It also draws on official national statistics on police recorded violent crime, hospital admissions data and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey findings, which are the main measures by which we gauge levels of violence in Scotland.

Scottish Government and violence reduction partner organisations, including the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, continue to work towards achieving the 15 actions contained within the Framework including developing a measurement framework. The first annual Progress Report is due to be published shortly highlighting the progress made so far and some of the activity being taken forward over the coming year.

The Role of the Justice System

The Scottish Government's Whole System Approach (WSA) to preventing offending by children and young people, rolled out since 2011, remains that children should be kept out of the criminal justice system, wherever possible and appropriate. This extends to young people currently in young offenders' institutions (YOI).

The WSA is based on prevention, early intervention and diversion approaches. This entails the use of non-compulsory interventions and supports where possible, then an emphasis on children's hearings measures where children come in to conflict with the law and compulsion is required, and using alternatives such as care settings like secure accommodation rather than YOI where a period of detention is required. That policy position remains unchanged. The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

(Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2024 came into force on 28 August 2024 and ended the detention of under 18s in YOI from that date, with smaller, trauma-informed and child-friendly facilities such as secure accommodation used instead.

Scottish Prison Service

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has developed an overarching Mental Health Strategy with a series of outcomes that reflect the needs of the whole population with the specific needs of young people referenced where relevant. The strategy outlines the support to be provided and the interface with key partners to ensure a holistic, whole person approach to care. It details how various aspects of prison life can aid prevention, promotion, and recovery in mental health being cognisant of the impact of other policies and strategies on mental health in custody, including the Scottish Government's review of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategies. SPS will publish the strategy in 2024.

A Young People's Strategy Group has been established to oversee a plan to ensure that actions are taken to implement the refreshed **Vision for Young People in Custody**. This has included:

- Supporting Scottish Government with planning for ending the placement of children in SPS custody.
- Preparing for the incorporation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish Law, notably developing a new physical interventions framework. This has been developed taking a human rights based and more trauma informed approach to managing young people in our care, in line with the refreshed Vision and Strategy for women in custody. This will increase the safety for all involved in an episode of restraint.
- Development of specialised training modules for staff recruited directly to residential areas

working with and caring for young people and women which has a central emphasis on trauma informed care. Staff are encouraged to reflect and contextualise trauma informed care for both the young people and female populations.

- A workshop with a focus on trauma informed care and mental health care for young people has also been developed to enhance the skills of existing staff. Both were piloted with positive feedback during 2022. The content of all youth products is being reviewed by SPS College to ensure they are up to date and relevant to the population.
- Undertaking self-evaluation at HMP & YOI Polmont and an adult establishment to find out about young people and women's wellbeing and the transition from YOI to the adult estate respectively.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) modules are now available, and a Scottish Trauma Informed Leaders Training package has been delivered to senior leaders covering aspects of trauma informed care and approaches. Moving forward, this will be rolled out to cover senior management teams across the prison estate.

In order to support the commitments of the “Strategy for Women in Custody”, the Scottish Government Population Health directorate have worked collaboratively with the relevant NHS Health Boards and other partners to develop appropriate trauma informed health care models at HMP Stirling and the Bella and Lilies Community Custody Units. We have invested over £2 million to date in funding these models.

The trauma informed and responsive healthcare staff working in the women's estate, will recognise where women are affected by trauma and adversity, be able to respond in ways that prevent further harm and support recovery, and can address inequalities and improve life chances of women in prison. Improving the health and wellbeing of women in custody will have a positive impact when they return to their families and communities

meaning that they are more likely to be able to care for their children, sustain employment and access the necessary supports to maintain their health and wellbeing and that of their families.

The Scottish Child Interview Model

The Scottish Government is continuing to support the implementation of national roll out of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) for Joint Investigative Interviews (JIIs) as part of the Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder Phase. This approach to joint investigative interviewing is aimed at providing a higher quality of forensic interview that ensures best evidence for court, allowing more scope for this to be used as the whole or part of the evidence in chief of a child in court, and for civil proceedings such as children's hearings and local child protection services. The ultimate outcome is to keep children safe and ensure that they have the right to justice. The principles of trauma-informed practice are woven through the new model and the underpinning training programme for interviewers with the needs and rights of children at the centre of their interview experience.

The SCIM is presently live in 27 local authorities, 12 policing divisions, and 11 health boards. Many involve cross-authority partnerships, working collaboratively across regions to deliver this new approach. The remaining areas are currently undertaking preparatory work to install the new model of practice. It is expected that the SCIM model will be introduced to every area of Scotland by the end of 2024.

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) are undertaking an evaluation of the impact of the SCIM on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

Scotland-specific **standards** were published on 31 May 2023. The Standards are based on the European PROMISE Quality Standards which reflect best practice from the Nordic countries.

Redesign of the Children's Hearing System – Hearings System Working Group

The Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) was established by The Promise Scotland in the summer of 2021 to keep The Promise with regards to the redesign of the current Children's Hearings System.

The group was independent of the Scottish Government, chaired by Sheriff David Mackie and with membership from Children's Hearings Scotland, The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and The Promise Scotland.

The HSWG published its final report on 25 May 2023. The report contains over 130 recommendations covering a broad range of policy areas relating to care systems, children's hearings, youth justice, legal representation, access to justice and preventative support for families amongst others.

The Scottish Government published its response to Sheriff Mackie's review on 21 December 2023. This accepts, or agrees to consider further, the majority of recommendations made in the report.

A public consultation on legislative aspects of Children's Hearings Redesign was launched on 26 July 2024.

Bairns' Hoose

Following the publication of Scotland-specific Bairns' Hoose Standards on 31 May 2023, we published a suite of documents on 1 June 2023: our refreshed vision, values and approach, Children and young people: participation and engagement plan and Bairns' Hoose – project plan: progress report and pathfinder delivery plan, which sets out the action taken to date and how we will trial the new Bairns' Hoose Standards in Pathfinder Partnerships.

The Pathfinder Phase was launched in October 2023 with the announcement of 6 successful Pathfinder partnerships and 4 Affiliate partnerships. The selected Pathfinder partnerships are Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Fife, North Strathclyde, Outer Hebrides and Tayside. The Affiliate Partnerships are Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Highland, and the Sycamore Partnership (Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian).

To date we have invested £3.7m during 2023-24 to support the Pathfinder phase of Bairns' Hoose development, with a further £7.23m investment in the Bairns' Hoose programme during 2024-25.

Supporting partnership learning as we continue to move at pace to successfully implement Bairns' Hoose in Scotland, we have extended the Pathfinder phase to summer 2027. The Bairns' Hoose project team is currently developing specific plans for how the programme will be delivered over the new extended timescale. These plans will be informed by discussion with key stakeholders.

The aims of the Pathfinder phase are for partnerships to trial and test the Bairns' Hoose Standards within each operational and geographical context; learn what works and identify challenges; and produce knowledge about the methods, practices and resources required for implementation.

Supporting these aims, we have developed five workstreams – Analysis, Knowledge Exchange, Quality Improvement and Service Design, Participation of Children and Young People and Funding Support.

The Pathfinder phase analytical approach supports Bairns' Hoose aims by focusing on implementation and process, in order to document the journey to becoming a Bairns' Hoose.

One of the strands of the Pathfinder analytical approach is to coproduce a set of Performance Indicators for all Pathfinder areas. The intention is for Pathfinders to collect and report these back to Scottish Government at the end of the Pathfinder phase.

A Standards Self-Assessment and Readiness Tool (StART) has been developed for Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder partnerships with a dual purpose of starting them on their improvement journey, and to gather evidence to help us understand the position in each partnership area.

The StART was completed by Pathfinder partnerships in February 2024 and will be completed again in August 2025. Information from the StART will help us to learn about the current state of readiness. It will help us to see where work may need to be targeted across the system and what support is required to meet the Standards in full.

In addition to the analysis of the two StART submissions and the development of Bairns' Hoose Indicators, the analytical approach also

includes a qualitative research element, consisting of interviews and/or focus groups with relevant professionals in each Pathfinder area. The aim of the research is to explore in greater depth the Pathfinder starting positions, plans and progress in moving towards operating as a Bairns' Hoose, as well as the position of Pathfinders at the end of the phase in terms of implementation of planned activities, achievement of Standards and identified outcomes.

Providing partnerships and stakeholders with the opportunity to share learning and knowledge with and between all parties, the Knowledge Exchange workstream has been established to support partnerships and stakeholders as they move to implement and deliver Bairns' Hoose throughout Scotland.

Our Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Plan sets our approach to participation and engagement and the actions we will take to deliver. Through this approach, we will make sure that Bairns' Hoose services best reflect the lived experience and views of those who matter most – the children and young people, and families of the children, who have experienced trauma.

We are working closely with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, who will support partnerships to ensure the voice of children and young people is represented.



National Child Protection Guidance

The **National Guidance for Child Protection** was published in 2021 and updated in 2023 to reflect legislative, policy and practice changes. This guidance supports practice that places children and young people's experience, needs, wishes and feelings at the centre of decision-making, builds on strengths as well as addressing risk and focuses on working in partnership with families and communities.

In September 2021, a National Child Protection Guidance Implementation Group, chaired by the Deputy Social Work Advisor and comprised of over 40 members from across social work, health, justice, education and third sector, was established. The Group ran for a period of 2 years to provide strategic oversight and offer support to local areas as they implemented the 2021 Guidance. The Group concluded in September 2023 after delivering a number of significant pieces of work. Examples include:

- publishing the **NHS Public Protection Accountability and Assurance Framework** which supported Health Boards to self-assess and assure themselves with regard to their responsibilities for child and adult protection;
- publication of NHS Education for Scotland eLearning resources to support health professionals in their child and adult protection roles – the modules have been completed almost 25,000 times as of mid-March 2024.
- establishment of a National Learning and Development Co-ordinator post for two years to develop a range of resources for local areas.

As part of the Implementation Group, a Monitoring and Evaluation subgroup was established to develop and implement an approach to monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Guidance up to September 2023. A self-evaluation exercise was completed by all 31 of Scotland's Child Protection Committees (CPCs) in relation to their local implementation of the National Child Protection Guidance. An **evaluation** presenting the findings was published by CELCIS in March 2024 that highlighted significant progress had been made by local areas despite challenging circumstances. This included progress in aligning local child protection processes with GIRFEC and the aspirations of The Promise. For instance, all areas had updated local child protection processes, either in full or in part, to ensure that they are strengths-based, trauma-informed and view child protection as part of a continuum of services for children and families as part of 'Getting it right for every child', beginning with prevention and early intervention.

Although the evaluation exercise highlighted that significant progress had been made, it also confirmed that implementation is ongoing for many areas and more time is needed for the Guidance to properly bed in. Therefore, although the Scottish Government's commitment to provide support has now been met, some workstreams are continuing with support from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government will continue to monitor implementation of the National Child Protection Guidance through a range of data sources.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

While our overarching ambition is to keep families together and to prevent children and young people becoming engaged in the care system, there are times when this is not the right or safe solution. We must ensure that when and where our children and young people enter care they have the support, love and stability that they need.

The Promise tells us that our children and young people with care experience are almost one and a half times more likely to have anxiety at age 16; and almost twice as likely to moderately use drugs at the same age. It also tells us that our adults with care experience are over one and a half times more likely to experience severe multiple disadvantage; and more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness.

This section provides an update on the activities underway to help ensure that our children and young people who are engaged with the care system have the best experience possible and are supported as they move towards a more independent life and adulthood.

Considering Our Language

Work to develop a universal definition of 'care experience' will help to develop a single understanding of what it means to have experience of care. The Promise tells us that this term has special meaning to many and that by developing a definition which encapsulates everyone, even with the smallest experience of care, it will help to normalise care as more people can understand it and how they can best support our children and young people. We will consult on a definition of care experience as part of a wider package of consultation in summer and autumn 2024. Details of the consultation package are included in **Part 3**.

The Scottish Government continues to provide funding to the **Each and Every Child Initiative** and has worked with partners to promote the initiative.

The initiative is working to create a fresh and inspiring narrative of care to shift public attitudes and tackle the stigma that can be associated with care experience. Since January 2020, Each and Every Child have been approached by over 130 organisations across Scotland to deliver bespoke training based on Framing Care Experience and the framing toolkit, including local authorities, Scottish Government, Corporate Parents and Third Sector organisations. Each and Every Child have worked alongside 'voices of experience' to help shape and drive the delivery of the initiative.

Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together And Connected

The introduction of siblings legislation in 2021 was a vital step in recognising the importance of siblings relationships, and keeping brothers and sisters together and connected. "Sibling" refers to the relationship where two or more children have one or both parents in common, or where they have lived together and have an ongoing relationship which is like this. The legal definition of siblings includes "sibling-like" relationships and therefore allows for a broad and flexible consideration of who brothers and sisters are, in recognition of the diversity of families and children's experience.

In recognising the complexities in sibling relationships, particularly when the needs and welfare of different children may sometimes appear to be in conflict, the Scottish Government published National Practice Guidance in 2021 and convened a National Implementation Group to consider the opportunities and challenges in realising our collective aspiration to keep siblings together. Who Cares? Scotland engaged with a group of children and young people with lived experience as part of this work to ensure their voices were held on sibling rights and how the legislation is being applied in practice.

The Groups **final report** and recommendations was published in June 2023. This recognised the high aspirations in the guidance for sibling relationships and that the legislation provides a

strong foundation for change. The Group went on to acknowledge that there are factors within the wider environment, such as the recruitment and retention of social workers, and availability of skilled carers, that challenge our collective ambitions to support siblings. A collaborative approach is therefore required to support the change necessary.

It is critical to establish a national picture of the extent to which brothers and sisters are placed together, to understand how the policy is being implemented in practice and where further support is required. As such, and as a direct result of the Group's work, the information that local authorities collect and report to the Scottish Government now includes, for the first time, four new data categories related to siblings, which includes sibling-like relationships.

The purpose of these four data items is to understand the extent to which children are placed together with their siblings in care. We continue to work with local authorities as the approach to sibling data develops in order to understand more fully the reasons why siblings aren't placed together. Questions on this will form part of future data returns.

A substantial output from the Group was the development of a **Staying Together and Connected: Getting it Right for Sisters and Brothers Learning, Development and Leadership Framework**. This set out the required skills and learning outcomes, taking a tiered approach in order to ensure that children's right to stay connected with their siblings is realised and the legislation and guidance are embedded in practice. We encourage all organisations who engage with children and young people to consider incorporating this framework into their own learning and development practices; recognising the importance of children and young people maintaining connections for healthy identity, development and emotional wellbeing.

We are engaging with practitioners and professionals across the children and families sector on the STaC Learning, Development

and Leadership Framework; and with partners including the Scottish Social Services Council, to consider next steps in relation to embedding the required knowledge, skills and abilities, as set out in the Framework, into social work education.

We will continue to work with stakeholders including Who Cares? Scotland, Education Scotland, Young Scot and others to understand what work is now required to raise siblings' awareness of their rights to stay connected to their siblings. This includes work underway to consider the advocacy offer to children and young people and the recommendations and proposals recently presented by The Promise Scotland.

In addition, a Siblings Community of Practice, jointly facilitated with The Promise Scotland has now been established. This forum provides a valuable opportunity for practitioners to reflect and learn from existing practice knowledge. The Community of Practice has met on a number of occasions in 2023/24 and has proven to be a supportive and solution focused space. We continue to engage with the Community to provide regular policy updates and to access the expertise and knowledge of the members as they share learning, practice and knowledge.

Use of Restraint in Residential Childcare

Work is ongoing across the Scottish Government in relation to reducing the need to practice restraint and seclusion. This includes working with partners to support the reduction of restraint in practice so that this is no longer used or needed in respect of children and young people in care.

In order to understand whether existing supports and tools for the residential care workforce remain fit for purpose, we are seeking to work with partners, such as CELCIS and Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group ('SPRAG'), to build-up a national picture of learning from the work that is currently underway. This will help us to better understand developing and innovative local approaches taking place in the

sector and identify the key values, principles and enabling environments that have been required to successfully embed trauma-informed care approaches which have reduced, and in some instances removed, the need for the use of restraint as the child's needs are identified and supported appropriately from the earliest possible opportunity.

Residential childcare workers need to be highly skilled to support the frontline work they do with children and young people in their care. In alignment with The Promise, many providers in the residential sector have built on the 2013 Holding Safely Guidance to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential childcare settings. The aim being for current practice to work within a more blended framework of regulation, guidance, practice support and precise reporting to best serve Scotland's young people.

We have continued to work with partners including Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group ('SPRAG') to explore all areas which support restraint reduction. We know that SPRAG have worked with the Care Inspectorate on improved consistency of reporting of restraint and restrictive practices and this has led to improved national data collection by the Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate have also published a restrictive practices self-evaluation tool to support practitioners and services to evaluate how well they are doing in reducing restrictive practices and identifying further areas of improvement. SPRAG are also involved in a variety of activities designed to positively impact efforts to reduce and/or eliminate the use of physical restraint, including responding to Scottish Government consultations and collaborating with the Care Inspectorate on defining restraint.

Reshaping our Approach to Secure Care (including the use of restraint)

Work is underway to establish how secure accommodation needs to be reconfigured to meet needs. This includes understanding the current profile of young people in secure and young

offenders institutions, how current or alternative services or provision can meet that need, and where there are gaps. We continue to work with partners – COSLA, secure providers, and Scottish Prison Service – to consider the impact on secure accommodation in Scotland. This includes ensuring capacity through on-going funding of Scottish Government paying for up to 16 beds in secure care as they become available until required by a child living in Scotland.

The secure accommodation bed complement across Scotland was 78 beds on 31st July 2023. Edinburgh Secure service, which prior to closure had 6 secure beds, closed on 30 June 2023. The average number of daily secure care residents in Scotland was 74 in 2014, and has risen to 82 in 2020. This fell sharply in the following 3 years, and in 2023 there were 59 average daily residents in secure care in Scotland.

Underneath these statistics, there has been a pattern of a falling number of young people in secure care on the average day each year from within Scotland, counterbalanced by a rising number of residents from outwith Scotland. In 2013, there were 7 residents in secure care units from outwith Scotland compared to 67 residents from within Scotland. By 2023, this balance has shifted to 22 out of the overall 59 average daily residents being from outwith Scotland.

The number of young people in prison has also been falling over the last 13 years. In 2009/10, the average number of 16-24 years olds in prison on the average day in Scotland was 2,318. By 2019/20, this figure more than halved to 1,011 young people aged 16-24 in prison on the average day. By 2022/23, this figure has fallen again to 668 16-24 year olds in prison on the average day. The number of 16-17 year olds in Prison in Scotland on the average day in 2022/23 was nearly 20 times lower than in 2009/10. Regulations to end the detention of under 18s in young offenders institutions came into force on 28 August 2024. Under 18s will now be detained in alternative settings, such as secure accommodation. Those under 18s who were detained in a YOI before 28 August have now safely transitioned to new settings.

The Youth Justice Improvement Board met in March 2024 to discuss an updated version of the Youth Justice vision and this was published in June 2024. The Board and its implementation groups are continuing to deliver on the priorities within the Vision, ensuring that children's rights are respected and that there is reinvigoration of the whole system approach to preventing offending by young people. This includes specific work on community alternatives available across Scotland and the publication of a framework for practitioners on community alternatives to remand.

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) have been commissioned to undertake a project to understand what is required to support secure care services to meet the needs of all children who are deprived of their liberty in the future. The Scottish Government, COSLA and Social Work Scotland are represented on a Governance Group which oversees delivery of the project. An interim report was published in December 2023 which summarises what children and young people and other stakeholders have told CYCJ during engagement sessions, combined with previous knowledge and research. The final Reimagining Secure Care report is due in September 2024.

The Reimagining Secure Care Project which the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice undertook on behalf of the government ran in tandem with the Parliament's consideration of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act.

Discussions with secure care providers about changes required to augment current provision are ongoing. The current secure care contract has been extended until March 2025. Scotland Excel have begun work to consider future commissioning arrangements which will take account of the forthcoming changes.

Young People Transitioning from Care into Adulthood

The Scottish Government recognises the particular challenges faced by young people who are moving on from care into adulthood and more independent living.

Financial stress and strain for young people moving on from care can quickly escalate to create a multitude of challenges and can lead to financial hardship. The Independent Care Review heard about the anxiety that is felt moving on from care and living alone for the first time.

We recognise that young people moving on from care to more independent living need a broad package of financial and practical support to help them thrive. In support, the Scottish Government has committed £10m to deliver a Care Leaver Payment, which will provide young people moving on from care with additional financial security.

The Care Leaver Payment, as proposed, is a one-off payment of £2,000 for young people leaving care. The amount of the payment was originally proposed as an annual payment of £200 to be paid for 10 years. Following consultation which reflected the impact of the cost of living, and the best potential impact for young people, the approach to support has changed to focus on a one-off payment of £2000. The payment will form part of a broader package of support which includes, but is not limited to, access to Continuing Care and Aftercare support for care leavers, the Care Experience Bursary and Council Tax Exemption for care leavers.

The Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 31 October 2023 and includes a power which will enable Scottish Ministers to create one or more schemes to give financial assistance to individuals who have had experience of being in the care system. This is named 'care experience assistance' in the Bill. In the first instance, this power will be used to establish the Care Leaver Payment by way of regulations. Details of the payment, including the delivery vehicle, will be set out in regulations following further consultation and engagement with those who may be impacted by the payment.

To further develop the policy and consider the best way to deliver the payment, a 'Discovery' phase was undertaken with the Social Security Programme. The Discovery phase ran from July to October 2023 and consisted of user research with care leavers, consideration of delivery vehicles, business processes, and the legislative and policy landscape. The outputs of Discovery were used to inform the development of the public consultation on the Care Leaver Payment and will continue to inform policy and delivery.

The public consultation on the Care Leaver Payment closed on 26 January 2024 and the responses are being independently analysed, Independent analysis of consultation responses was published on 18 June 2024. The responses to the consultation will be used to inform further policy development and decision-making. Details on the eligibility criteria, processes and delivery model of the payment are still to be determined and will be set out in regulations in due course.

We continue to actively listen to, and work alongside, those with care experience through our partnership working with the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf). Staf's '100 days of listening' exercise, which concluded in February 2024, has given us the opportunity to hear from people with care experience and those who support them in terms of how we can improve the experience of 'Moving On'.

The themes which emerge from the 100 days of listening will inform a consultation, scheduled to launch in summer 2024, that will focus on the support package required to best support our young people to flourish as they move on from care.

Alongside this wide-ranging consultation, we are working with our partners and those with lived experience to consider the improvements required to Continuing Care and Aftercare. As part of the first phase of this work, we will publish updated Continuing Care guidance, which aims to provide further clarity to those providing and receiving Continuing Care.

The Care Inspectorate is presently undertaking a Thematic Review of Care Leavers transition services, which will implement recommendation 3 of the Care Leavers' pathway. The review is scheduled to provide a final report in November 2024.

Homelessness

We understand the importance of having a place to call home and the very real difference having a solid foundation can make to people's lives, especially children and young people. We also know that the best way to end homelessness is to stop it from happening in the first place. That is why we continue to work closely with COSLA and third sector partners to deliver our **Ending Homelessness Together** action plan, which includes a commitment to develop prevention pathways for those at highest risk of homelessness, including care leavers and young people.

We are supporting delivery of the plan by providing a total of £100 million from our multi-year ending homelessness together fund to transform the homelessness system. This includes funding of £62.5 million which has already been provided to local authorities between 2018-25 for implementation of their rapid rehousing transition plans to support people into settled accommodation and reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

Housing First is an important element of rapid rehousing. It provides settled accommodation with intensive support for people who require it. There are a number of local authorities in Scotland operating Housing First for youth programmes, which are targeted at care leavers to ensure they get the person-centred support needed to maintain their tenancies.

Most funding for homelessness is provided through the local government settlement but we also give local authorities £30.5 million annually for their work to prevent homelessness. This helps support the excellent work taking place across Scotland to help people avoid the trauma and disruption of homelessness while further developing the foundation on which the homelessness prevention duties will build. The duties form a key part of the Housing (Scotland) Bill which was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in March 2024. It will create a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness, prioritise prevention over crisis response for people who do need support and enable more choice and control within the system. The Minister for Housing has convened a Ministerial

Oversight Group on Homelessness which brings together ministers from across the Scottish Government to promote joined up working, strategic funding and to drive forward the ethos of a shared responsibility to prevent homelessness. This is in recognition of the fact that often there are missed opportunities to support someone before they reach crisis point. Nobody should have to present as homeless to access the help and support they need. This is particularly true of children and young people who may need a different type of support.

In 2023-24, we committed an additional £2 million of funding for local authorities to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, recognising the impacts, especially for children, of spending too long in temporary accommodation. And we will invest over £90 million in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) in 2024-25 – an increase of over £6 million on 2023-24 – which enables us to mitigate the previous UK Government’s bedroom tax and benefit cap.

Premature Deaths

The National Hub for Child Death Reviews (CDR) has been in place since October 2021 and is conducting a review into the deaths of all live born children up to the date of their 18th birthday, or 26th birthday for care leavers who are in receipt of aftercare or continuing care at the time of their death. The aim of the National Hub is to ensure that a quality review is undertaken following the death of every child in Scotland and identify themes and trends via the use of standardised forms and processes for Health Boards and local authorities. The Hub’s focus is to use evidence to inform practice to reduce the number of child and young people’s deaths in Scotland and to report annually on its findings.

In March 2024 Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate published an overview of learning arising from the first year of CDR implementation **National Hub overview report: Year 1**. The Scottish Government will work with partners in the National Hub to implement the 5 recommendations and to continue to share learning in order to reduce the number of preventable deaths and harm of children and young people.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

In achieving this and our ambition to keep families together where it is safe to do so it is imperative that we have the correct structures and services available to help. The Promise refers to this as ‘the Scaffolding’ and tells us that our children and families must be supported by a workforce that is there when it is needed.

The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

This section provides an update on the activities underway to help ensure that our children and young people who are engaged with the care system have the best and most fulfilling experience to improve their outcomes and are surrounded by love.

Caregivers

Our caregivers – kinship or foster carers, and adoptive parents – provide an invaluable role in the lives of children and young people who cannot stay at home with their birth parents. In 2023, 34% of looked after children were looked after in kinship care placements, and 32% in foster care placements. We recognise the incredible support and love that caregivers provide to the children and young people in their care. We are committed to improving the support we give to caregivers – at both a strategic and practical level – so they are better equipped to love and nurture the children they look after and provide a secure, stable and loving home.

Most children and young people grow and develop and have their wellbeing needs met within their own birth families, and GIRFEC provides the framework for providing additional support to families where this is needed. For some children alternative family care to ensure their wellbeing and protection is needed, often for short periods, but on occasion permanent alternative care is required. In Scotland permanence can be achieved through four routes, the first of those being a permanent return to the care of

a parent. The other three are legal routes – a Permanence Order, a Section 11 Kinship Care Order or an Adoption Order. The most appropriate route to permanence will depend on the needs and circumstances of the child. We remain committed to one of the core principles within our Scottish legislation, that of minimum intervention – intervention should only occur where it is necessary and to the level necessary.

The Scottish Government are committed to providing support for all caregivers and their families, to enable them to provide the best possible care for the children who need it, and to do this when and where it is needed. We recognise that although progress has been made, there is more to do, and moving forward we will develop our support for caregivers, as a whole, and with targeted support detailed below for specific caregiver communities. We will continue to invest in the PATHways programme in 2024-25 to allow adoptive families, kinship and permanent fostering families to benefit from therapeutic support and a peer support parenting group; and will improve the existing Scottish Government website so that all caregivers and prospective caregivers can access information at a national level.

We will develop national Permanence Good Practice Guides from 2024-26 to support best practice across Scotland. These guides will focus on: Keeping In Touch; Supporting Birth Parents; and Supporting Families in permanence. And we will continue work to more fully understand the need of alternative caregivers, and equip them to deal with the impact of trauma on those they care for.

We will review the implementation of the Scottish Recommended Allowance, starting in the autumn of 2024, to assess whether it has brought greater consistency and transparency to the allowances paid to foster and kinship carers, what is working and what is not, and whether there are any other areas for improvement.

Kinship Care

The Promise, aligned with Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC), underlined the importance of children being supported to remain with their parent(s) where it is safe to do so. Where this is not possible the first consideration – where it meets the needs of the child and young person – is for them to live with adults with whom they already have a healthy, enduring relationship, and are already within their own family (or close friends) network. International evidence² demonstrates that kinship care helps a child retain a sense of family, identity and heritage and increases the chances of that child maintaining critical links such as staying in the same school and community. The evidence also tells us that children in kinship care feel less stigma, feel settled and safe and there are lower levels of concern reported for the wellbeing of young people in kinship care compared to foster care³. Kinship care can also bring with it the increased possibility for reunification with the birth family where appropriate. The strong policy emphasis on kinship as the first consideration has existed explicitly in Scotland since 2007.

In response to what carers and practitioners have told us the kinship care **guidance for Part 13 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**, has recently been refreshed. This includes clarification of definitions and who is able to access the **Scottish Recommended Allowance**. This is a step towards making improvements for kinship families and those who work with them.

Moving forward we will support kinship carers by publishing later this year a new national assessment framework for assessment of kinship carers caring for a looked after child, to improve consistency of practice across local authorities.

In realising our vision to ensure children are actively supported to stay with their families where it is safe and possible to do so, some Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs) are using Whole Family Wellbeing Funding to support

² CELCIS (2020) Spotlight on Kinship care

³ Permanently Progressing (2019): Building Secure Futures for Children

kinship care and as a key element of their work on transformational change. The provision of whole family support, in line with the unique needs of the family, is crucial to keeping children and young people within their family network. This should be provided alongside financial, practical and emotional support which may be relevant as part of wider support in kinship situations.

Fostering

Foster carers provide a key role in providing safe and loving homes for children and young people who cannot live with their family. It has been a critical strand of how alternative care is provided for children for many decades. We know that there are challenges in recruitment and retention of foster carers, in Scotland and other parts of the UK, due in part to the pandemic, an aging workforce, cost of living and increased demands such as complexity of need exacerbated by increased numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children entering Scotland.

Reporting from the Care Inspectorate shows that the number of new foster carers approved each year has fallen in each of the last 4 years. While 15 fostering services in Scotland in 2022 had more approved foster care households in 2022 than the year before, 33 services reported fewer households, resulting in an overall reduction across Scotland of 165 households between 2021 and 2022⁴.

We are engaging with the sector to consider how local and national government can work together to secure the future of fostering by addressing some of those challenges. This includes supporting fostering through the recommended national allowance for foster and kinship.

We will continue to support foster carers by exploring the feasibility of developing and launching national communications aimed at recruiting more foster carers, working with local authorities and stakeholders.

In autumn 2024 we will undertake a public consultation on the future of foster care. This consultation will set out our vision for foster care in the 21st century and a flexible fostering approach to meet the many and varied needs of children and young people, and, therefore, accelerate the delivery of The Promise. This will include how we support learning and development, recruitment and retention and address the day to day challenges in foster care.

We are working towards having the Scottish Government's HR leave policy updated by autumn 2024 so that all employees who are foster and kinship carers will have access to dedicated foster and kinship leave to support their roles as carers. We will also work with other employers across Scotland to support them to support their foster and kinship carers.

Adoption

Adoption has, and will continue to have an important role in providing safe, loving, permanent homes for children and young people with care experience in Scotland.

The advent of other routes to permanence means more children are remaining with their extended families, and since 2018 the Care Inspectorate has reported a downward trend in the number of new households being approved for adoption each year. However, for some children and young people adoption will continue to be the best option for achieving permanence, and meeting their needs.

Our work to keep The Promise includes supporting adoption as a positive permanence option for these children, as well as supporting the adoptive families who make this possible and giving attention to the needs of adult adoptees.

⁴ Care inspectorate 2022-23 fostering and adoption statistical bulletin.

We recognise that all those affected by an adoption journey will require support at various stages, both before, during, and after an adoption order is granted. This is especially true when recognising that adopted children and young people are still care experienced, even though they are no longer 'looked after'.

We will continue our support by developing and publishing an adoption vision statement which sets out the place of adoption in Scotland today and our strategic priorities moving forward, including a focus on understanding the needs and priorities in relation to improving the consistency of post-adoption support across Scotland.

The Scottish Governments recognition of adoption as a positive permanence option will be seen in our continued support to organisations delivering to those affected by adoption, including adopted children and young people and their families, adult adoptees and those working in the adoption sector; and the role of Scotland's Adoption Register which supports agencies to match approved prospective adopters with children who are identified as needing an adoptive family.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Since the Scottish Government first pledged to keep The Promise in 2020, Scotland has welcomed a growing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UAS children). Some of these children arrive in Scotland and claim asylum, and others arrive in different parts of the UK before being placed in Scotland through a UK-wide National Transfer Scheme.

There are currently more than 500 UAS children being looked after by local authorities in Scotland, in addition to hundreds more young people with care experience who are 18 or older, who arrived in Scotland as UAS children. This means that to meet The Promise, we need to provide good support and care for UAS children and young people, and also to take account of the impact that the arrival of UAS children is having on the wider children's care system.

Many UAS children will have specific needs – for example in relation to language teaching – which are different from other children. In addition, since most UAS children are 16 or 17 when they arrive in Scotland, residential homes and foster care will not always be the most appropriate accommodation for them. Some might prefer supported living accommodation – to enable them to live with a degree of independence, while having access to the support and help they need.

However, although some of the needs of UAS children will differ from those of other looked after children, the fundamental principle of The Promise – that children will grow up loved, safe and respected – applies to all UAS children, just as it applies to all looked after children in Scotland. In the years ahead, we will work to ensure that we deliver The Promise for UAS children.

Children's Services Reform: Improvement Work Plan

We commissioned the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) to carry out **independent research** to help us answer the question: 'What is needed to ensure that children, young people and families get the help they need, when they need it?' The study began in September 2022 and consisted of four strands of research:

- The first strand provides a rapid evidence review of existing published national and international literature associated with different models of integration of children's services.
- The second strand provides six case studies which explore a range of approaches to transformational reform programmes. Five of these looked at approaches to changes in the structures and modes of delivery of children's services in countries with a similar demographic to Scotland and the sixth explored what can be learned from Scotland's experiences of national service reorganisation through the development of Police Scotland.
- The third strand maps the range of different approaches to integrated children's services across Scotland's 32 local authority areas and investigates any potential effects of integration.
- The fourth strand captures the views of over 1,400 members of the children's services workforce on the opportunities, challenges, barriers and facilitators that are found to bring about high quality experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families using services.

A final summary report was published on 13 December 2023. This brings together key themes and learning from across the study's findings and determines that there are a range of elements which contribute to creating the optimal conditions for implementing effective, sustainable change to improve support and outcomes for children, young people and families.

The CELCIS research is clear about the challenges facing children, young people and families and those supporting them across Scotland. The research has provided considerable insight into care systems both at home and internationally and a solid evidence base is offered for improvement that can be made without, or alongside, structural changes.

A number of themes for improvement have been identified from the research findings and an exercise is underway to identify and map any ongoing work which will address these. This exercise will also highlight any areas for improvement which are currently not being addressed, with consideration given to how work in these areas can be coordinated and delivered, ensuring this takes into account any impacts on the workforce.

We are keen to continue to work in partnership with internal and external stakeholders, therefore our collective approach to improving outcomes will be agreed through liaison with partners such as, members of the Children & Families National Leadership Group, Children's Services Planning Strategic Leads Network, COSLA, and Solace representatives among others.

Our ambition is to simplify systems so their impact on the workforce is a key consideration in the development and delivery of policy and improvement initiatives. This will support them to deliver services and support to children and families which is underpinned by children's rights, GIRFEC values and national practice model, and the principles of holistic whole family support, so that this leads to improved outcomes and safeguards, supports and promotes the wellbeing of children and young people.

Building Capacity

To achieve our ambition to keep The Promise it is necessary that we build on a strong legislative framework, that our financial ambitions are aligned and recognise that to improve outcomes we must invest in prevention; and that continued improvement must be underpinned by good information and evaluation so that we know that we have both kept The Promise and that we will continue to keep it. It is also important that children and young people understand their rights and how the law applies to them.

This section provides an update on the actions that we will take to build this capacity to support the change required to improve the lives of our children, young people and families.

Legislative Change

The Promise told us that there must be a clear legislative, enabling environment that supports families to stay together and protects and allows relationships to flourish. Legislation that has progressed since 2022 that support change include:

- **The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill** was reconsidered by the Scottish Parliament in December 2023 and the Bill was approved unanimously. The Bill received Royal Assent in January 2024 and is now the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Duties under the Act commenced on 16 July 2024.
- **Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023** was brought forward to reform how remand is used, and how release mechanisms work for certain prisoners. We consulted on this between November 2021 and February 2022 and the Bill was passed on 22 June 2023, becoming an Act on 01 August 2023.
- **Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill** was introduced in Parliament in December 2022 and passed on 25th April 2024 and became

an Act on 4th June 2024. The Bill will enable improvements to youth justice, secure care, aspects of the children's hearings system, victims' services and the criminal justice system.

- **The Housing (Scotland) Bill** was introduced to Parliament on 26th March 2024 as per our commitment in the 2023-24 Programme for Government. This Bill will enable the delivery of our commitment for longer-term private sector rent controls; tenants' rights and other protections; and duties aimed at the prevention of homelessness. It's right that we focus our action to support those most vulnerable, especially during these challenging times, in order to achieve our shared goal of delivering safe, affordable, and quality homes.

Promise Bill

The Scottish Government aims to introduce a Promise Bill by the end of this Parliamentary session, dependent on wider pressures on the Parliamentary legislative calendar. The Bill will be positioned to make any further legislative changes required to keep The Promise. For example, this may include, provisions required to implement recommendations of the Children's Hearings System working group and recommendations of The Promise Scotland in relation to a national lifelong advocacy service for people with care experience.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with partners including The Promise Scotland and COSLA to identify areas where a legislative direction may support delivery of The Promise. Subject to Parliamentary timetabling,

Aberlour Poverty and Hardship Fund

Aberlour's Poverty & Hardship Fund was supported through The Promise Partnership Fund. The aim being to support families experiencing extreme poverty by testing/refining solutions. Using the Scottish Approach to Service design, Aberlour developed a test of change which provided debt relief to families who were engaging with their family support services across Tayside.

Many families supported through this test of change, had multiple debts, 75% of which were public debt-related, such as council tax and rent arrears. This project cleared family's debt and also linked families into Welfare Rights Services, who were able to offer help around income maximisation and wider money advice. Through this approach, families reported reduced stress and anxiety. Improved engagement with the wider support services was also highlighted.

Families who have had the debt removed reported significant relief and unburdening with a positive impact on their levels of anxiety and hope for the future.

Aberlour also developed resources and tools (including the creation of a financial well-being toolkit) to ensure practitioners were offering families good financial support. This is currently being utilised across all of Aberlour's services in Tayside and is likely to be rolled out more widely across services in Scotland.

South Ayrshire Council

South Ayrshire Council received over £229,000 through The Promise Partnership Fund. This investment helped to focus in detail on the population with care experience across 4 cluster groups (secondary and primary schools) to include children and young people previously looked after for the first time.

Broadening focus from 'looked after' to 'care experience' was a big change within education and brought new insight. It considered the time that it takes to build relationships with young people and their families and deepen understanding of trauma and learn how to feature this into work moving forward.

It enabled the team to value the experiences of young people and their families and in doing so challenge the existing culture of hierarchy and power differential between teaching and non-teaching staff within schools and across the school community.

They did this by ensuring the roles connected to the project were recognised as leaders with a support network and infrastructure of reflection built in to allow them to co-produce a tailored curriculum offer with young people with care experience. This allowed them to work collaboratively within and beyond the school community to join up activity and approach and widen networks of support.

The Village

Care Visions received funding from The Promise Partnership Fund to support the collaboration of three partner organisations: Care Visions, Scottish Attainment in Action, and Early Years Scotland. Their aim was to establish a completely new approach to supporting families with care experience. From this the Village was born.

The Village is an accessible, independent online community which provides knowledge and support to parents and parents-to-be with care experience. Designed to break down stigma, with parents choosing to join with no referrals needed. Once joined, they are linked with a Village team member who can offer a listening ear, specific advice, or general support.

Co-production and active participation are central to the Village ethos. This approach has changed the power dynamic, with parents actively choosing to be involved, adding value to the community overall. Referrals are not accepted from third parties and support is driven by what parents want and need.

The aim being to empower parents, allowing them to have full control of their involvement. There is no requirement for parents to prove their care experience at any point. Instead, all are welcomed into a trauma-informed, safe, and confidential space where support and guidance are made available in a manner which best suits those accessing it.

As well as the advice and information, the provision of practical support has made a significant difference to families, ensuring they are accessing financial support they are eligible for has helped to maximise their incomes. Some Villagers have noted that without this, they would have had to seek to borrow money from friends/family, which can be embarrassing and can cause fractious relationships. The Village were able to offer some direct financial support to families due to additional funding received, which was welcomed by all.

Dundee City Council

Dundee City Council received £200,000 through The Promise Partnership Fund. This proposal is looking at a whole systems transformation founded on approach of doing things with, rather than to, and will focus on the engagement of children, young people, parents, and carers. This involved the creation of a multi-disciplinary team, working with CELCIS to build capacity around named persons, developing systems to triage and allocate the right support and pathways to offer self-directed support to families with disabled children.

The Alliance – an intensive family support hub – has been established and offers support to families across Dundee. Figures show the number of young people with care experience have reduced, and the stability of care has improved.

Highland Strategic Partnership

Aberlour received a grant of £99,500 to work collaboratively with organisations in the Highlands to improve access and quality of through care and after care support for young people in care.

Through mapping and consultation with young people, The Highland Strategic Partnership identified priority areas for improvement. Groups were established to create change on each priority area. At the center of this redesign work are the experiences and voices of young people with care experience utilising the **Scottish Approach to service design**. The Partnership involves **Aberlour**, Action for Children, Barnardo's, Highland Council, Gateway and Right There.

The Residential Care Group

The Residential Group was led by Aberlour and had participation from young people with care experience, Highland Council, Barnardo's, and Gateway.

Young people said that having a personalised welcome pack with information and resources that they could understand would make them feel wanted and valued when arriving in care. They decided to create a 'welcome box'. This is a wooden box, that can be personalised and drawn on, filled with toiletries, a photo album, water bottle, colouring books and pens, a fidget spinner, and inspirational quote cards written by young people with care experience from the Highlands.

The welcome box is now provided to every young person arriving into care in the Highlands. 50 boxes were produced using Promise Partnership Funding. Highland Council now provide these boxes to young people entering a residential care placement.

The Moving On Group

The Moving On Group was led by Barnardo's and had participation from young people with care experience, Highland Council, Aberlour and Gateway.

Young people said they wanted to understand their rights better. Barnardo's are commissioned in Highland to deliver the aftercare service and all young people have allocated pathways coordinators who they meet with regularly. The service has a Barnardo's Rights Representative, and all young people are supported to understand their rights and ensure their rights are upheld.

Young people and professionals from The Barnardo's Service spoke about the housing pathways for young people with care experience. From this, there are proposals to provide better support for young people with care experience. This includes a simple step of adding a check box to the Highland Council Housing System to identify when a young person has experience of care and may need additional support.

Young people who participated in the Moving On sub-group had the idea of a 'My Journey Book'. This is a journal for young people with care experience to fill in that will help them feel in control of what is happening on their care experience journey. The partnership launched this journal in February 2024 and a copy will be available for every young person in care in the Highlands.

Next Steps

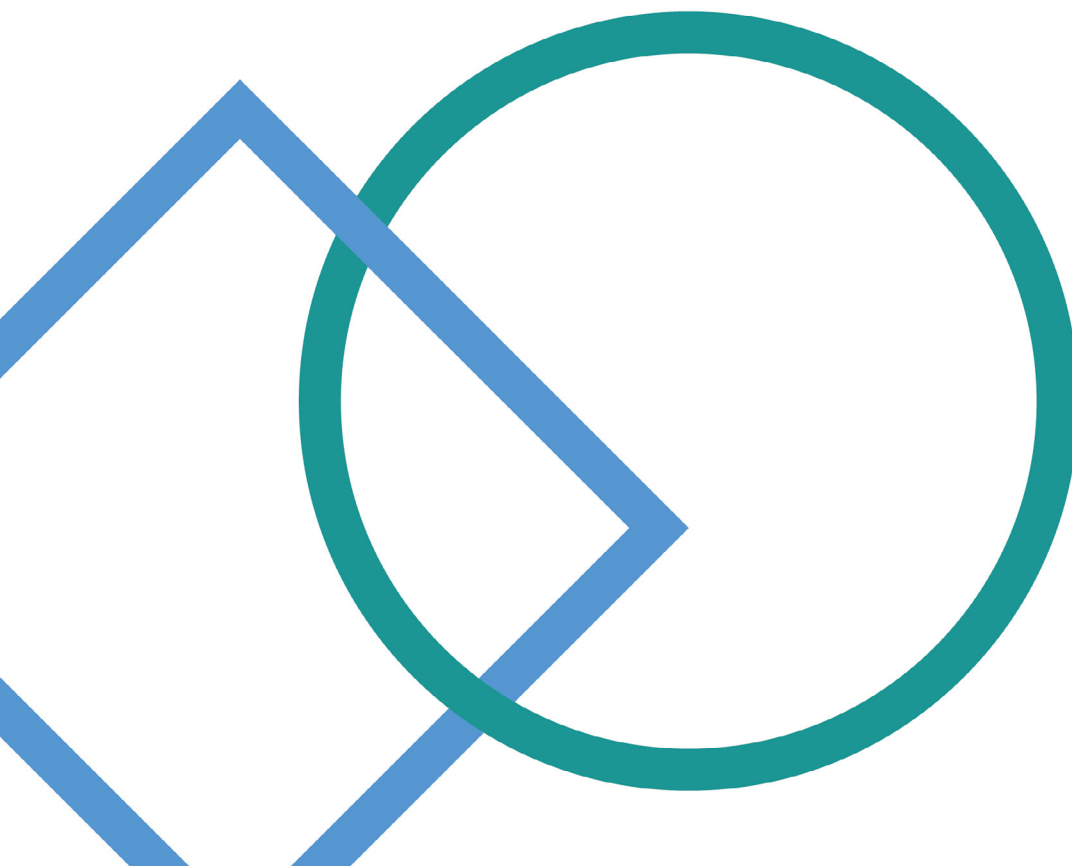
This update on key areas of activity demonstrates that progress has and continues to be made to introduce the national framework required to support change. Keeping The Promise requires us to continue to join up across our Government policies and actions and to work strongly in partnership to introduce transformation. A fundamental shift rather than incremental change is needed that places love and relationships at the centre of the experiences and outcomes.

A detailed review of activity against all of the actions and commitments included within The Promise Implementation Plan is set out in **Part 7**.

As we progress, our activity to keep The Promise continues to work in harmony with the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26⁵ and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation⁶. It is also aligned with our strategic approach to education, health, justice, transport and communities. This connection across our strategic ambitions, our policies and our activities is presented in the update to our actions and commitments in the following chapters. The next stage of our journey to change is set out in **Part 3**.

⁵ Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

⁶ Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)





Part 3

The Next Stage of our Journey to Change

In presenting this update on progress the Scottish Government do so connected and aligned to the wider work that is being led by Fiona Duncan, Independent Strategic Advisor for The Promise, and The Promise Scotland to develop Plan 24-30.

Plan 24-30 sets the strategic direction of travel for the remaining period that The Promise has identified the change programme must deliver. Furthering our commitment to lead from the front, this update from the Scottish Government is designed to directly inform the work underway and regular updates have been shared with The Promise Scotland as we have progressed this review.

In addition to the detail set out against all the existing actions and commitments in **Part 7**, nine key actions to support the next stages of progress.

- **We will lead a package of consultation work from summer to the end of 2024 to inform the next stage of policy development and in support of the legislative direction to be included with The Promise Bill**

The voice of the community with care experience must remain at the heart of all the work we do to keep The Promise and set the direction for the commitments outlined in our Promise Implementation Plan. We recognise our role, alongside partner organisations, to align our activity and ensure the opportunity to share views and experiences. From June to the end of 2024,

we will take forward a coordinated programme of consultation and engagement. This will involve working with partners to deliver a connected package of participation and engagement with children, young people, adults with care experience and their families, and the workforce which supports them. This package of consultation will include:

- Consideration of a universal definition of Care Experience
- Implementing the outcomes of the work to redesign the Childrens Hearing System
- A package of support for young people transitioning out of children's care services
- On the future of fostering

We will work closely with key partners to support consultation activity and wider engagement. The Children and Young People Participation Framework Agreement will support us to lead a coordinated approach across a broad range of representative bodies to deliver structured engagement that is broad in geography, age and scale.

Children & Young People Participation Framework Agreement

Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), every child and young person who is capable of forming their own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. Particular consideration should be given to how views will be obtained where children and young people’s views are not known on a matter that is likely to have an impact on them.

The Children & Young People Participation Framework Agreement (The Framework) has been developed as part of the UNCRC implementation programme to respond to the growing need for children and young people’s participation in decision making and policy design across Scottish Government.

The Framework offers an approach that ensures a broad range of children and young people are involved in the wider work of the Scottish Government especially those identified as being seldom heard, furthest from their rights because of factors related to their personal development, features of their family life, or because of wider influences that impact on them within their community. The Framework aims to support engagement that is inclusive and address barriers faced by those under-represented in decision-making processes.

- **The Minister for Children, Young People & The Promise will Chair a Partnership group of key stakeholders to support delivery of topics for change, including oversight of the coordinated consultation programme. The first meeting of the group will be held in autumn 2024.**

The Minister will bring together key partners to jointly consider the status and identify forward actions to aid progress. This will include the approach to lifelong advocacy for people with care experience, the development of a universal

definition of care experience, as well as other topics being considered as part of the co-ordinated programme of engagement taking place from summer to end 2024.

The outcome of this joint work will inform identification of any legislative proposals for inclusion within The Promise Bill; areas for the development of improved guidance; and direct what should be recorded and reported through the progress monitoring framework.

- **We will work closely with The Promise Scotland to lead a Quality Improvement Programme. This will provide a national learning opportunity using a method to test and learn what works and to share best practice across Scotland**

We will focus on supporting change where it is needed using the systematic rigour of a quality improvement approach. We will work collaboratively to innovate, test and learn about what works sharing and spread of our learning to support improved outcomes.

- **We will develop and promote a package of support for foster carers**

Informed by a national consultation on fostering, we will identify what further support is needed to develop a package of financial and practical support for foster carers so they feel better equipped to nurture and care for the children they are looking after.

We will improve the existing Scottish Government website so that all Caregivers and prospective Caregivers can access information and support at a national level; and explore the development of national communications to recruit more foster carers.

■ **We will continue to progress work across public protection areas to support those vulnerable to harm, to reduce risk, and to ensure that people get the right help at the right time.**

We will work to identify areas where we can work together across public protection to develop a strengthened approach to protecting people that recognises that individuals and families may be linked into multiple public protection systems at the same time, and connects policy both locally and nationally to ensure the best possible outcomes for all individuals, families, and the workforce.

■ **We will continue to work with COSLA and other key stakeholders to assess how National Care Service benefits, and system improvements, can be offered to both adults and children consistently across Scotland**

The independent research clearly shows there are functions which are better discharged at national level, such as policy, guidance, standards, and data structures. However, it also shows that localities are better placed to deliver the day to day provision of services and support in a way which responds to the individual needs of people living in that area.

The National Care Service (NCS) will empower us to strike the right balance between national consistency, regional strategic planning, and local delivery, and it is right to explore how these new arrangements and processes can benefit both adults and children equally.

The importance of joined-up, multi-disciplinary working and a holistic approach to the provision of social care, social work, primary care and community health support cannot be overstated in an environment where children and families have multiple needs and can often be known to, or require support from, a range of services, whether in respect of abuse and neglect, recovery from trauma, addiction, involvement in criminal justice system, disability, physical or mental health, or poverty.

For example, in 2022/23 a total of 10,748 children were subject to a decision or measure by the Reporter. Out of these, one third was issued due to a lack of parental care and one fifth was closely related to domestic abuse. Additionally, for around one half of children on the Child Protection Register, drugs and alcohol were a key factor for registration, with many also affected by the impacts of domestic abuse and parental mental health. This further reiterates the need for a whole-family approach and arrangements which best ensure integrated delivery of support across adult and children's social work, social care, primary care and community health services, and justice services.

The NCS is being co-designed with people with lived-experience, with active participation and human rights-based approach at its heart. This means that children and young people could have a say in what NCS looks like, how it delivers services, and how their voice should be heard and represented across its structures and processes.

This meaningful involvement of children, young people and families, and, in general, people with lived experience, in the co-design of the new system, is an important step to take, in an environment where children, young people and their families often feel not listened to. In fact, this practice should be expended to other reform activities to ensure an explicit feedback loop is in place to monitor implementation, gain feedback on what difference we are making to improve outcomes and experiences of children, young people and their families, and to ensure their views visibly inform reporting on progress as well as influence decision-making at every level.

■ **We are refreshing the common core framework of knowledge and values required of everyone who provides support to children, from birth to young adulthood, and their families.**

The original '**Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Values for the "Children's Workforce" in Scotland**' (the Common Core) was

introduced in 2012 to describe the knowledge, skills, understanding and values which should be the foundation characteristics of all those working with children and young people in Scotland.

The Practice guidance for Scotland's framework for improving outcomes for children and young people, **Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)**, was refreshed in 2022, and during the passage of the **UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill**, the Scottish Government commissioned the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to lead on a refresh of the Common Core, working together with key partners to do this.

This refreshed Common Core aims to provide the foundational values and learning required to deliver the Promise and provide holistic family support and rights-based practice in accordance with UNCRC and GIRFEC principles.

■ **We will progress the delivery of a rights and relationship based practice and trauma informed training programme for the integrated children and family's workforce**

We continue to work with partners to support the workforce to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential child care settings. The emerging evidence from active practice implementation is both a reduction in restrictive practices and developing skillsets of a specialist workforce.

Working to support the implementation of The Promise, and as part of the **National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP)**, we continue to rollout 'Transforming Connections', a tailored 'Trauma-Skilled' level training and coaching package, to people who work alongside children and young people with care experience in priority sectors of the Children and Families workforce in Scotland, including school nurses, health visitors, secure and residential care providers and Children's Hearings Scotland. A training for trainers model is also operating for future sustainability.

In addition, the development of trauma training and resources to support alternative caregivers (kinship, foster and adoptive parents) provide trauma-informed care for their children and young people is currently being considered as part of the long term delivery plan for the NTTP, with next steps currently being identified.

The **Trauma Responsive Social Work Services Programme** has developed a workplan with partners that aims to embed trauma responsive practice into social work services across Scotland. This includes children's, adult and justice social work services and workforces.

■ **We will introduce the national Promise Progress Framework working jointly with COSLA, The Promise Scotland, and key stakeholders. The Framework will be jointly used to support informed decision making nationally and locally.**

The Promise Progress Framework will provide Scotland with a shared understanding of where we are in (the journey towards) keeping The Promise. This will tell the story of the processes in place to generate change and how these are impacting the outcomes we need to improve, which allows us to be responsive in guiding what needs to happen next.

The Scottish Government, COSLA and The Promise Scotland will jointly publish a Statement of Intent before the end of 2024. This will set out a joint evaluation strategy detail on the structure of The Promise Progress Framework and a timeline of the development and publication of quantitative, qualitative and experiential data over the medium and longer term.

More detail on the present status of the work and how we are understanding progress towards keeping The Promise, and how this can be used to help set direction in the coming years is set out in **Part 5**.



Part 4

Whole Family Wellbeing Investment Approach

Where have we come from?

The Promise identified a clear need for early, holistic family support in helping families to stay together, where it is safe to do so. Together with partners from across the sector, the Scottish Government (SG) co-produced a **Vision and National Principles for Family Support in Scotland**, focussed on all families getting the right help, at the right time, for as long as they needed.

Programme for Government (PfG) 2021-22 committed to investing £500m over the lifetime of this Parliament to support the development of holistic, whole family support services in line with our Vision and National Principles. The PfG commitment recognised that a fundamental change in the system was required to deliver this vision for families. It also recognised that our vision should go further than preventing families from entering the care system. It was about supporting families with their broader wellbeing and ensuring availability of support that can wrap around each family's individual needs. By doing so, we would be helping Scotland's families to thrive and preventing them from reaching crisis.

The latest Programme for Government set out our approach to deliver person-centred, whole family support and over the year ahead, we will work with partners to introduce additional local flexibility in how existing budgets and services can be reconfigured. Working with local partners to pool budgets and streamline reporting requirements, where possible, with clear local plans in place for delivering shared outcomes.

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme (the Programme) was established with the purpose of driving the system change required at the

local level, principally through existing Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs), to deliver family support in line with our National Principles. Recognising the varying circumstances of local areas, the Programme did not seek to mandate a specific delivery model that would be required everywhere. Instead, we asked CSPPs to assess their current delivery system and consider what the gaps and opportunities were for them in delivering holistic support for families.

What have we done?

Since 2022 we have invested over £110m in a programme of activity aimed at responding to what the sector told us was required to support local areas to deliver whole system change. This has included:

- **£96m for CSPPs** (Element 1) to build local service capacity for change and to transform family support services. Each CSPP is responsible for deciding how to spend their allocation, based on a local assessment of need.
- **£1.6m National Support for Local Delivery** (Element 2) – recognising the need for local partnerships to learn from each other to support change, we established a package of activity to support the development and sharing of learning across CSPPs and beyond and, where possible, to actively support a systematic approach to change. Funding has also supported external evaluations of Years 1 and 2 of the Programme and its impact.

- **£13.1m for taking a cross Scottish Government approach to system change** (Element 3) which is supporting 12 projects across Scottish Government policy areas to help progress the aims of the Programme. This includes delivery of two new mother and child units to be run by Aberlour Childcare Trust; funding towards the Dundee Pathfinder, which is taking a person-centred approach to tackling child poverty as part of a partnership approach between Dundee City Council, the Scottish Government and the Department for Work and Pensions and local partners; and funding for Inverclyde Transformation Initiative supporting approximately 100 young people, providing targeted intensive one to one provision, focusing on risk reduction, group work, peer mentoring and diversionary activities. A full list can be found on the online **Knowledge Hub** (K Hub).

CSPPs report progress of their Whole Family Wellbeing Funding activity and spend as part of their annual CSPP reports. These reports demonstrate a variety of activities across local areas that are beginning to transform family support systems. Some examples include several areas establishing or enhancing local groups to facilitate children and young people to co-produce and design services, such as 'Champions Boards'. Some areas are scaling up previously piloted programmes, such as family support hubs or services to support pregnant women and parents with their mental health or substance use. Working towards improving whole systems approaches, some CSPPs are developing multi-agency working groups and systems to ensure better collaboration. Finally, several CSPPs are specifically focusing on recruiting more staff and activities that provide greater support for existing staff. Illustrative examples are included below, with fuller detail and case studies available in the **Year 1 Evaluation Report**.

What does this look like in practice?

CSPP Funding (Element 1)

In East Renfrewshire funding has been directed towards two key areas of activity: Learn Well and the Intensive Family Support Service. Learn Well is a programme for non-school attendance of pupils with care experience with significant mental wellbeing concerns. The service supports pupils (S1-S4) with their wellbeing and education while they are experiencing Emotionally Based School Absence (EBSA). Currently East Renfrewshire supports 22 young people through this approach.

The Intensive Family Support Service is for very vulnerable young parents and their small children. The team works alongside community social work, with families of children under the age of 12 years, where a need for more intensive support has been identified. A referral to the team is recommended when children have been, or are at risk of being, removed from the care of their family and if child protection registration is being considered, including at the pre-birth stage. The service strives to work in accordance with the 10 principles of family support outlined in The Promise. The creation of the health visitor post in November 2021, thanks to Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, has allowed the team to provide health advice, support, and guidance to the families they work with, when they need it and as often as they need it.

In West Lothian there has been an expansion of mental health support and coverage across the area. Previously, this support was only available for mental health referrals, and it has now been expanded to support all families in West Lothian who are feeling isolated or overwhelmed. As part of their Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, West Lothian have provided a place-based approach of bringing families together in a non-clinical environment, specifically families with a child or young person aged between 0-18 years old.

Mental health support is provided by trained volunteers who are supported by a Family Support Manager. Families involved self-score on mental health factors and undergo a review with the Family Support Manager every three months, while children and young people have interviews or discussions instead.

In **South Lanarkshire** the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding has supported a scale up of a family support programme called Pathfinders to seven schools. It is available for families on the edges of care, to reduce the need for more complex intervention at a later stage. The Pathfinders project is working with secondary schools and social workers to engage with families whose children are disengaged from school, with a focus on preventing the child or young person from being taken into care.

The programme promotes hubs in schools and discussion with families, following referrals from social work or the school. The multi-agency nature of this programme has enabled the hubs to make links with families more easily. For example, the Pathfinders project will give families a number to call for support or show them where to go to access support. This hub approach has minimised the need for formal referrals and reduced the time taken by families to identify the correct point of contact for their needs.

National Support for Local Delivery (Element 2)

East Lothian is one of three collaborative partnerships we have been working with to collaborate on the delivery of local outcomes, while collating in depth learning about what it takes to deliver change in a complex system with the intent of sharing this learning nationally.. East Lothian's change and practice team have been working collaboratively with the WFWF National Support Team, comprising of improvement and implementation specialists from the Scottish Government and CELCIS, to develop their knowledge and skills in supporting their change work and to enable sustainable improvements to deliver the right changes for families, communities, and those delivering support. Support has included a variety of facilitation, teaching, mentoring and coaching around: the use of Quality Improvement

thinking and tools; Active Implementation Science thinking and tools; data and social research supports; participation, co-design and community engagement; ways to capture and tell the stories of the work; and initial exploration of collective leadership to support individuals in leading and managing change.

The work is anchored by strategic alignment across the children's partnership and within the East Lothian Childrens Services Plan 2023-2026, with the intention of further supporting connectivity from practice learning through to strategic partnership decision making. There is also work underway to assess how data is used to support the measurement of preventative and early intervention focused work, as well as exploration of how learning data can support CSP decision making.

As well as funding to establish a change team, East Lothian have received additional funding to test their approaches to transformation and have used these funds to supplement a team of Family Outreach Workers practicing in Fa'side and Dunbar. The team provides tailored support to help families deal with some of the challenges that come with daily life through building strong relationships, built around families' specific needs and circumstances. The team are working with families to understand what matters most to them and building on families' skills and strengths to improve their confidence. Families have asked for support with the following: child and family life, understanding what support they can access locally, finance and budgeting and household issues. The practice team also have a focus on testing out the different ways families and partners can access support that is easy, timely and stigma free, offering support through a trauma informed lens.

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Element 2 support, underpinned by a quality improvement approach, has enabled East Lothian to build an understanding of what it takes to achieve change across the different levels – from strategic thinking to delivering services.

Learning into Action Network

In collaboration with the Improvement Service, we have established a Learning into Action (LiA) Network. The LiA Network enables members to collaborate, facilitate peer support, share learning and approaches from across the country, and to enable solution-focused discussions around the barriers to whole system change.

With the support of our LiA development group (comprising twelve self-nominated members from across several CSPP areas and partner agencies), we continue to co-design and co-produce a varied programme of work. LiA Link & Learn sessions are held every 6-8 weeks, covering themes such as Engagement with the third sector; Self-assessment; and Engagement and participation with families. LiA Monthly Mingles enable a more informal approach through providing an 'open space' to help foster richer conversations and meaningful relationships between different CSPPs.

Link & Learn sessions are well attended, with an average of 16 different CSPP areas (from a total of 30) represented at each one. CSPPs have told us that they welcome these sessions; with a recent poll showing that 97% of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they found the session relevant to their WFWF work.

Our associated K Hub also provides further opportunity for members to connect and access a bank of useful resources, tools and materials to support their WFWF work as well as related policy activity.

"It's good to have a central point that is easy to connect with"; "Good to have access to others who have experience/ learnings that they can share"; "...a space to follow up on discussions from break out rooms in Mingle/ Link & Learn sessions".

Effective commissioning and procurement of family-based support services

Our Year 1 evaluation told us that commissioning and procurement activity is often viewed by CSPPs as being a barrier to effective working in holistic family support. A six-month project,

in collaboration with Scotland Excel and wider partners, has commenced with the aim of providing a clear evidence base on what action is needed to support effective commissioning and procurement of family-based support services.

Taking a cross Scottish Government approach to system change (Element 3)

Aberlour Mother and Child Recovery Houses project aims to increase capacity for residential rehabilitation services for women impacted by alcohol and drugs at Aberlour Childcare Trust, through establishing two residential rehabilitation recovery houses. The houses are a transformational new residential recovery service designed specifically to support women and their children (up to age five) through treatment for substance use, before they reach a point of crisis in having their children removed from their care. This activity links to WFWF ambitions and aligns with the national priorities of The Promise and Getting it Right for Every Child, through its wraparound provision of childcare alongside residential rehabilitation. WFWF is providing full revenue funding of the project to 2025-26.

The first Mother and Child House in Cowan Grove Dundee, is a 4-bed residential recovery house, opened its doors in December 2022. This is a national service available to women throughout Scotland. The service provides community outreach support and assessment to each woman prior to entering the residential house, and during their stay. Women and their children can stay for as long as is needed for their recovery, and when the women leave the service, Aberlour's outreach team continue to provide them with support within the community for as long as they require it. The second 4 bed house in Falkirk is now completed and will be officially opened by the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy on 2 September. 2024.

Inverclyde Transformation Initiative – Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Early Intervention and Prevention for Families project adopts a collaborative, early intervention approach and supports the whole family to benefit at the right time, when and where it suits the families. It builds

on the partner's (Action for Children) expertise in supporting families where young people are at risk of criminal exploitation linked to SOC through a new transformational initiative with families being able to co-create support packages with a consistent key worker to navigate through services.

The project, building on an existing model developed and delivered in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, is adapted to the unique circumstances within Inverclyde. The overall aim of the project is to build wider understanding to normalise the consideration of Child Criminal Exploitation within the delivery of family support at a national level. Proposals will generate learning to shape policy and influence strategic direction while creating new ways of working and practice approaches that can be widely disseminated and shared across all 32 local authorities. WFWF is fully funding the project until 2025-26, helping to support approximately 100 young people, providing targeted intensive 1-1 provision, focusing on risk reduction, group work, peer mentoring and diversionary activities.

Where are we now?

Our Year 1 evaluation has told us that CSPPs have valued the opportunity to develop their family support offer and the autonomy they have been provided with to tailor their response to the needs of their local communities. In addition, the flexibility of the WFWF has enabled the scaling-up of successful support or creating new types of support where that need exists.

However, the evaluation of Year 1 activity and our engagement with partners has also told us that transforming the services in a way that sustains positive change over the longer-term is going to take more time. And that our partners need further support to deliver this change and embed it for the future.

The need for additional time and support has been a consistent and strong message from our partners against a backdrop of wider challenges; from challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, to evidence of an increasing number of families in crisis and budget constraints across public

services. It takes time to build relationships across services, partners, and communities and to do so in the right way. Taking a short-term approach to funding does not enable the level of trust required to be built between partners, and we know that this is critical to achieving and embedding sustainable cultural and systemic change.

Our year 1 evaluation indicated that in 2023-24 many CSPPs had not spent their funding in full, and more time was required to establish the culture and system change in family support before CSPPs would start to consistently observe early outcomes. Time is needed for local areas to assess current provision and community need, and to identify gaps in support and how they should best be addressed.

What will we do in response?

1. Give additional time and take decisions on future funding based on robust evidence

We have listened and learned from the first year and a half of the Programme and have a clearer sense of how to further enable the conditions for change. The case for additional time has been clearly set by our partners and after much consultation and engagement the Scottish Government has decided to extend the timeframe of the Programme beyond the current end point of 2025-26.

The Scottish Government does not intend to prescribe a new end point for the programme at this time. We want to ensure our decisions continue to be evidence based, responsive to learning, and take account of what local areas need by way of support. It is also recognised that elongating the Programme will take it beyond the current parliamentary term. This investment approach cannot bind future administrations to funding decisions beyond the Budget the current Parliament will approve for 2026-27. However, we can make evidence-based recommendations about where funding should best be deployed and at what level. The timeline below is the starting point for that and sets out the key points at which we expect that evidence will be available

to all partners, and what decisions it can inform, and when. This timeline will be refreshed on an annual basis.

A key metric is how the Programme is supporting the overall delivery of the Promise by 2030, by supporting families earlier and more holistically *before* they reach crisis points and interactions with the care system. Given the purpose of the Programme is to enable this change at a local level, our outcomes are focussed on understanding the progress of local areas in building and sustaining holistic family support services in line with our National Principles. The framework for this is set out in our Programme logic model, which will be updated again with partners in advance of the procurement of the Year 3+ evaluation during the second half of 2025.

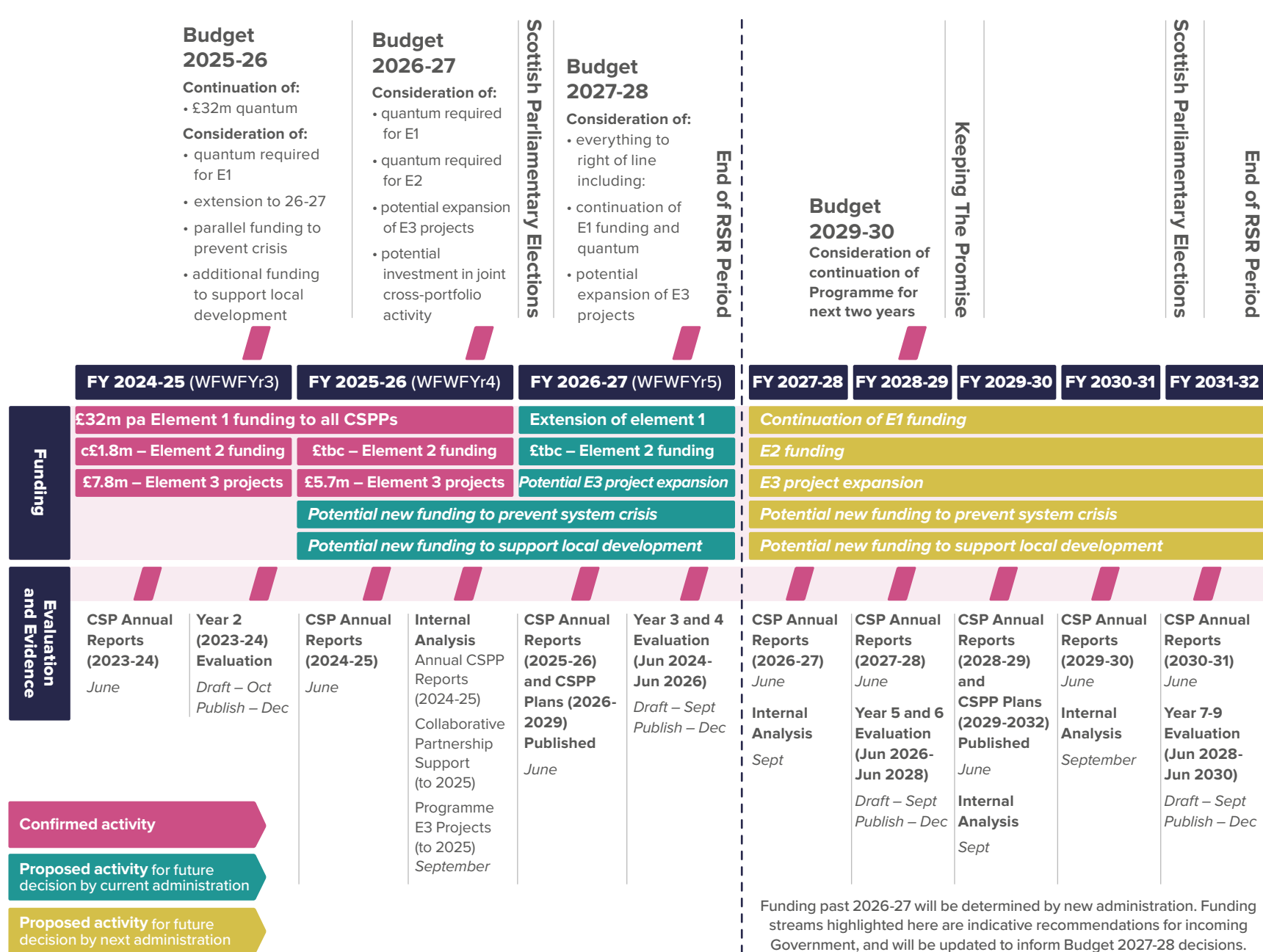
We will continue to deliver a robust evaluation programme, building on the Year 1 and Year 2 evaluations, to track progress throughout the life of WFWF. A contribution analysis approach is being developed which will support our understanding of how the programme is directly contributing to key Programme outcomes. Future evaluation reports using this approach will provide us with a robust evidence base from which to evolve existing funding streams and develop new

Decisions about making changes to, increasing or winding down individual elements of funding will be taken at key identified points set out in the timeline below. It is proposed that formal evaluation reports are provided in 2026-27 and 2028-29. The latter, based on data from 2026-28 will be the final point of formal WFWF evaluation *before* 2030 (by which time Scotland has pledged to have kept The Promise) and will allow funding decisions to be taken to maximise the impact of the Programme in advance of this time point. The Promise policy officials and The Promise Scotland are represented on the WFWF evaluation advisory group, and we will work closely with them throughout evaluation planning. If required, a further evaluation can be provided in 2031-32. This would provide a full retrospective picture of delivery to 2030. It would not inform funding decisions but would review impact and inform future policy direction beyond the lifetime of the programme and The Promise.

The evaluation reporting dates have been chosen to align with the availability of relevant data. This is to ensure the most robust and comprehensive picture of the Programme delivery and impact. Analytical updates in the intervening years would be provided based on all available data, including CSPP annual reports.



Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Investment Approach Timeline



2. Maintain our commitment to funding all CSPPs and take an evidence-based approach to future funding

Our Element 1 funding currently provides £32m of annual funding direct to all CSPPs via the General Revenue Grant provided to local authorities. This is a significant investment and critical part of how we will keep the Promise and improve children's outcomes by ensuring families can access the support they need, where and when they need it. CSPPs are responsible for collectively agreeing how to spend this funding in support of WFWF transformational aims. Recognising the urgency to transform services, the Government's ambition is to increase the scale of this investment, but we must take an evidence-based approach to any future funding decisions. At the current time, we only have the Year 1 evaluation (2022-23) to demonstrate evidence of how this funding has been deployed or was planned to be deployed. In recognition of the importance of security of funding for local partners, it is our intention to work with COSLA, and in the context of the Verity House Agreement, to extend the funding for CSPPs into 2026-27 – the last year in which we can take spending decisions as part of the Resource Spending Review period (2023-24 to 2026-27). In doing so, we will continue to work in partnership with COSLA and CSPPs to build our evidence base of spend. This will inform our annual consideration of the funding available and ensure it best supports transformation.

3. Explore new funding streams to support local transformation

The elongation of the Programme timescales brings the opportunity to evolve, expand and expedite our approach to funding local activity. We are listening to feedback which suggests that new funding streams could be usefully deployed to further support transformational change for example through:

- Responding to the immediate issues system of an increase of families in crisis.
- Providing additional funding to some individual CSPP areas to support their next phase of implementation based on evidenced need.

We have begun to develop our approach to these in partnership with COSLA and other key stakeholders, with a view to informing decisions taken in the context of future budget discussions.

A. Responding to the immediate needs of families in crisis

We have received clear messages from partners about the challenges of the wider operational context restricting their ability to drive sustainable transformational change. This includes concerns about an increasing number of families in need of immediate support, and the parallel impact of funding pressures on the existing local infrastructure that supports them, including third sector services. While we want the Programme to focus on developing a future system of more holistic support, we recognise that addressing the immediate challenges that families are facing is a critical component in enabling this longer-term shift.

In considering any expanded funding in the future, we will consider where funding could help alleviate the strain on services delivering crisis intervention, and therefore allow more capacity for transformational change. For example, this could be in the form of direct support for families, or additional support for services which are under strain in the current fiscal context. We need to consider and recognise the wide range of activity already underway at local and national level including the

variety of community-based early help and support currently provided by the third sector, and the need to sustain and develop this infrastructure as part of future delivery. We will also need to take into account the work via Social Security Scotland and wider activity to tackle child poverty. We will therefore work with partners to consider what interventions could best address these issues, maintaining a focus on how this would support our theory of change in building and sustaining local systems of holistic support.

B. Providing additional funding to individual CSPP areas to support their next phase of implementation based on evidenced need

As set out above, we currently provide a total of £32m to local areas through CSPPs to support delivery of the Programme. It has always been recognised that CSPPs are at different stages of delivering transformational change and this was highlighted by our initial findings report in 2022-23. As such, some local areas may be more ready to move beyond scoping and testing approaches to embedding them as a sustained offer of support for the families they serve. We want to be able to support local areas as flexibly as possible, noting their different needs. For some, this may require one-off spending to secure infrastructure. For others, this may mean funding evaluation work to support a business case. Or it could mean funding to support the initial set up costs of expanding services beyond the initial ‘test’ areas.

Whatever the need, we recognise the importance for a funding approach which balances a light-touch, flexible and non-competitive approach, with assurance that short-term funding is being requested as part of a strategic plan for local systemic change. The evaluation and sharing of this developing local practice is also critical – where models of delivery are working well, we want to build the evidence base by which other local areas can develop their own interventions.

Again, we will work with partners to consider in more detail how new WFWF funding streams could best support this next stage of activity, where local areas are ready to progress their plans.

4. Expand our national support offer to help CSPPs

The elongation of the Programme also provides the opportunity to develop and expand our offer of practical support to help CSPPs deliver on the ground. We have been engaging with CSPPs to understand their priorities in this area, as well as drawing on expertise in delivering transformational change. As a result, we will be evolving our current support offer to focus on four key themes:

- **Our ongoing commitment** to Collaborative Partnerships and the LiA Network, with adaptation of the latter to align with the proposed Learning System.
- **Supported Self-Assessment** for CSPPs to participate in a facilitated self-assessment of their approach to delivering improvements. This will involve a collaborative process designed to increase capacity and capability for change, to identify and build on local assets and to support CSPPs to define improvement priorities.
- **Developing a Learning System** to support the Scottish Government, CSPPs and national partners to apply a systematic approach to help get evidence into practice through collaboration and joint learning. We are scoping how best to optimise the connections between other national transformational change programmes including The Promise and Early Child Development given the clear overlap.
- **Focused Quality Improvement Support:** we are scoping a national Quality Improvement support offer to help bring focus, connection and method where it is most needed. As part of this scoping, we have identified the pre-birth to three age group as a critical population to focus on. Improving the experience and quality of life at this early stage can have a significant positive impact on outcomes later in life. This population also links to other national transformational change programmes, including The Promise and Early Child Development, ensuring we provide a joined-up offer to local areas.

Each component of this expanded offer is either being actively developed and scoped with a view to beginning implementation in quarter 3 of 2024, or work is already underway, specifically in relation to leadership support as one aspect of the learning system.

The expansion of the support offer will require ongoing investment in providing local areas access to expertise in transformation, collective learning and development opportunities, and peer support. As with other aspects of the programme, we will be led by evidence and feedback and flex our approach accordingly over the coming years.

5. Evolve our cross-portfolio approach to develop joint propositions for future investment

As outlined above, under Element 3 of the Programme, we have already invested over £13m in 12 projects across wider Scottish Government portfolios, which support various aspects of holistic family support. These programmes are running to different points up to the end of 2025-26. Elongation of our timeframes gives us the opportunity to build on the learning of those programmes and take informed decisions about whether further investment would support our national approach to early, holistic whole family support. As these projects conclude and are evaluated, we will take decisions about the future investment required as part of the annual budget process.

In addition, we want to ensure we continue to maximise opportunities for taking a cross-portfolio approach in recognition of the broad reach of services that support or engage with families. We particularly recognise the opportunity to develop this work in the context of a wider programme of public service reform, including the next phase of joint activity with local government through the Verity House Agreement. The Scottish Government is also committed to responding to stakeholder feedback that the current funding and reporting landscape could be simplified.

Opportunities include:

- **Continuing to explore opportunities for practical alignment of WFWF with other funding streams** that share a common purpose, whether this includes a focus on the same target population or delivering on similar outcomes. For example, the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund, which is distributing funding to local authorities for targeting initiatives, activities, and resources towards children and adults up to 26 years old with care experienced. The elongation of the Programme provides greater opportunity to do this, given the varying timeframes of established funding streams.
- **Taking a targeted approach to how WFWF can contribute to cross-government joint work on prevention**, particularly in relation to taking a holistic approach for supporting families. This includes recognition that there are a number of different programmes supporting transformational work in this space and there is the opportunity for stronger connections and integration of evidence and approach for greater impact. These opportunities include the Social Inclusion Partnerships, GIRFE, Early Learning and Childcare, and other Pathfinders. The Early Child Development Programme also highlights the evidence around the importance of providing support as early as possible to enable caregivers to provide the nurturing care that babies and young children need, from pre-birth. We want to ensure there is a concerted effort in taking a cross-Scottish Government approach to these key areas of work moving forward, with consideration of how we best deploy Scottish Government support in a way that continues to deliver for local need and deliver innovative ways of working. The Programme is well placed to be a key partner in this activity in a range of different ways, which includes collaboration on support, place-based activity, and funding activity. The outputs of this collaboration will inform future budget and policy decisions from 2025-26.



Part 5

How We Are Understanding Progress

Scotland is striving to be the best place for children and young people to grow up, and we know children in and around the care system have the same needs to thrive as all children. There are many factors that impact this ambition and, importantly, that affect the lives and wellbeing of families.

Improving outcomes for children and families requires transformational change across Scottish Government policy areas, national and local public authorities, communities, and Third Sector Delivery Partners. While no basket of measures will be able to definitively tell us whether The Promise has been kept, we must understand how our activity so far is impacting the aims we are looking to achieve and enable us to tell the story of change.

The outcomes for Scotland's children and families are monitored through several Scottish Government frameworks, focusing on different population groups and areas. It is imperative that where there are shared aims across different population groups, we have a shared understanding of what "good" looks like and how it is measured, even when the journeys to achieving this need to look different for different population groups. This builds consensus around our desired direction of travel, and avoids confusion around the same thing being measured in many different ways.

While Scotland has the ambition for those in and around the care system to experience the same outcomes as all children and families, the Independent Care Review shed light on the specific challenges they may face, and support they may require. This is why an approach is being created collaboratively to allow us to understand how we are making progress towards Keeping The Promise.

The Promise was clear that whilst outcomes are important, it is the experiences and relationships that happen on the journey to those outcomes that really matter to children, young people and families and have long lasting consequences for their lives. Therefore, we must translate the national outcomes into something that is meaningful to children and young people's lives so that we can understand if Scotland is truly the best place for them to grow up. We must not allow our processes to ignore experience in favour of tracking outcomes.

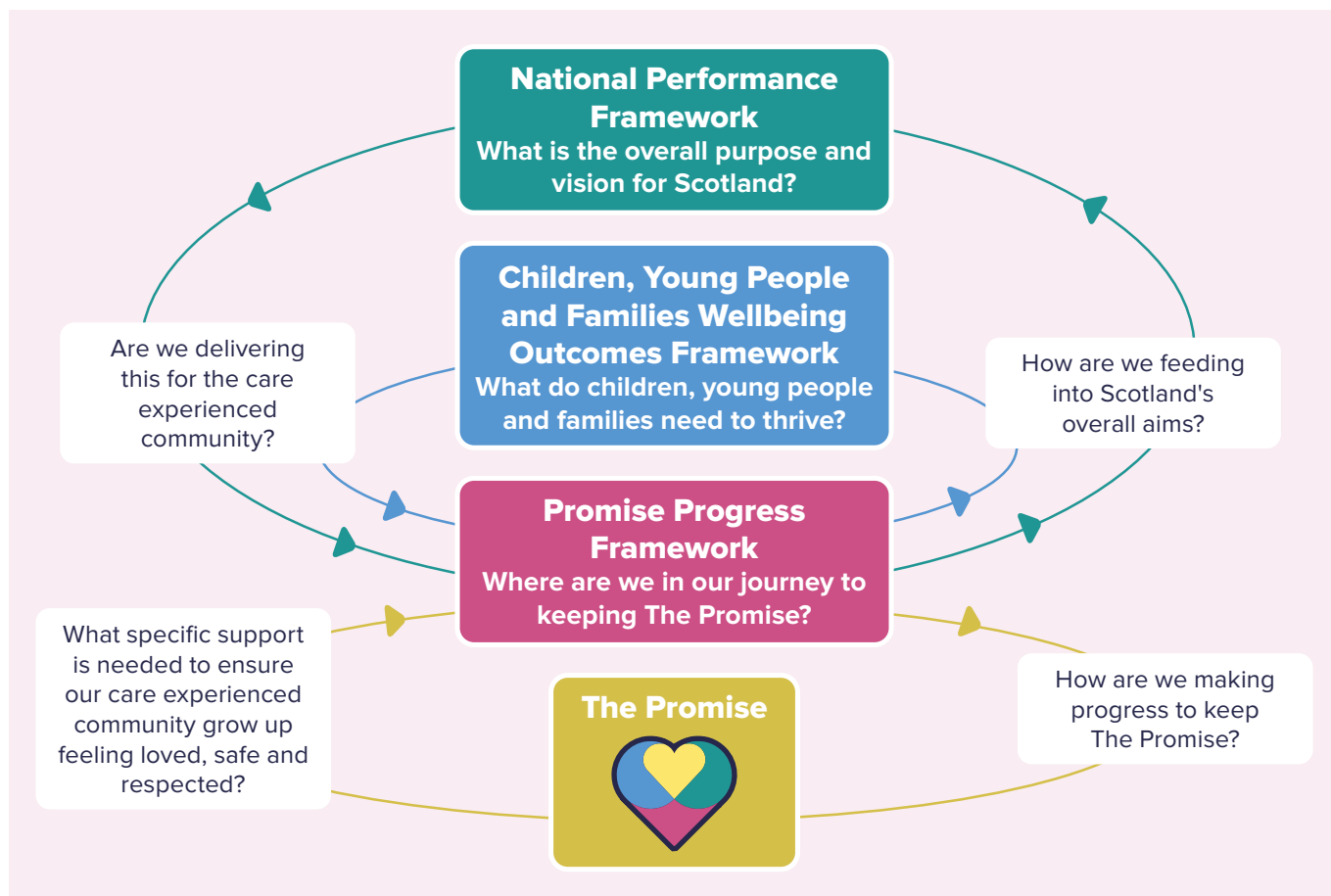
An overview of the current reporting landscape, and where reporting on The Promise sits within this wider landscape is presented in Figure 7 on the following page.

Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF):

The **NPF is Scotland's wellbeing framework**, setting out an overall purpose and vision for Scotland. It highlights the broad National Outcomes that support the purpose and provides measures on how well Scotland is progressing towards those outcomes. The NPF includes 'increased wellbeing' as part of its purpose and combines measurement of how well Scotland is doing in economic terms with a broader range of wellbeing measures.

These outcomes describe the kind of Scotland we all want to live in, with The Promise reflected across the National Outcomes. Of particular relevance is the Children and Young People Outcome, which refers to growing up loved, safe and respected so that every single one of us can realise our full potential.

Figure 7: How The Promise Progress Framework sits alongside other national frameworks



Through the ongoing Review of the National Outcomes, a new National Care Outcome has been proposed, to recognise the importance of all forms of care for our collective wellbeing. This outcome would increase the visibility of children and young people with care experience in the NPF.

A revised set of National Outcomes and Indicators and how we utilise the NPF in our decision making, our policy priorities and our budgets is a continuous process, and as a government we are committed to bringing these strands together ever more effectively will be published following Parliamentary scrutiny. To achieve this we will also publish an Implementation Plan alongside the revised NPF, that will set out how government will continue to mainstream and raise awareness of the NPF.

Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework for Children, Young People and Families contributes toward a holistic understanding of what we mean by wellbeing, based on what children and families have told us matters, and rooted in GIRFEC and children’s rights. This Outcomes Framework plays a key part in providing the overarching strategic coherence needed, but it is not enough on its own. The outcomes approach will only add value if we commit to contextualise it within wider sources of data, information, and evidence, where we consistently work to link local information to decision making and national monitoring.

In reporting on the core wellbeing indicators, analysis will identify where there are significant differences in outcomes for particular groups of children and young people. This means that as well as identifying key trends, areas of success, and areas of concern within the Children, Young People and Families population, reporting will demonstrate how well Scotland is closing any 'wellbeing gaps'. This in turn helps to inform priority setting and adapt planning at both a local and national level.

The Promise: Stories of Progress

The Promise: Stories of Progress is being jointly developed by Scottish Government, COSLA and The Promise Scotland. It will provide Scotland with a shared evidence base that allows us to understand where we are on (the journey towards) keeping The Promise.

Our work to keep The Promise is anchored by our Theory of Change, set out in **Part 1**, which hypothesises the primary drivers, secondary drivers and activities which need to be undertaken across Scotland to realise our collective vision. In order to guide our work over the coming years we need to better understand how this work is impacting the experiences and outcomes of the care experienced community.

A key part of the Promise Stories of change will be The Promise Progress Framework. This will draw on national-level indicators across a range of areas to build a link in our understanding between how the activities underway are feeding into the vision for change. The framework will aim to develop our understanding of how the processes in place are impacting the outcomes we need to improve, which allows us to be responsive in guiding what needs to happen next.

Some of these areas of focus within the Promise Progress Framework seek to make sure Scotland's care experienced community are supported to achieve the same outcomes that we want everyone to experience, for example when it comes to health, mental health or educational

outcomes. Where useful in these cases, the framework is aligned to the National Performance Framework and Children, Young People and Families Wellbeing Outcomes Framework to make sure we are understanding whether the care experienced community is getting what we all need to thrive, and how this work is contributing to Scotland's overall aims.

Elsewhere, our aims are focussed on the specific scaffolding and support we need to provide to the care experienced community as and when they interact with the care system, for example when it comes to supporting caregivers, keeping brothers and sisters together, and transitions out of care into adulthood. Here, engagement with policy experts, local colleagues and third sector organisations is key to designing a framework that captures the key outcomes which give decision makers the insights needed to drive positive change.

Once The Promise Progress Framework is in place, it is intended that organisations and bodies can use it to guide and locate their own organisational level reporting, allowing the national picture to be understood separately from the local and/or sector picture. This will provide great opportunity to identify implementation gaps in getting evidence into practice reliably and consistently. Development of the framework is being used to guide prioritisation of future data development projects, through data linkage improvements, collection of experiential data, and qualitative research.

The Scottish Government, COSLA and The Promise Scotland will jointly publish an update to this work before the end of 2024. This will set out our joint approach to understanding progress, an assessment of the baseline, and plans for future development.

This statement of intent will be a key part of Plan 24-30 and engagement with the care experienced community will be undertaken to support the next stages of its development.

Visions, outcomes and processes

The Promise Progress Framework seeks to bring together and grow an evidence base across 10 key vision statements taken directly from The Promise, which are:



Where children are in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.



Scotland must limit the number of moves that children experience and support carers to continue to care.



Schools in Scotland must be ambitious for care experienced children and ensure they have all they need to thrive, recognising that they may experience difficulties associated with their life story.



Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.



Scotland must strive to become a nation that does not restrain its children.



Scotland must ensure that there is timely access to mental health support before crisis point, so that children can avoid hospitalisation.



Care experienced children and young people have access to intensive support ensuring that their health needs are fully met.



Scotland must stop locking up children who have often experienced the failures of the state in the provision of their care.



Young adults for whom Scotland has taken on parenting responsibility must have a right to return to care and have access to services and supportive people to nurture them.



Older care experienced people must have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them. Those services and the people who work in them must have a primary focus on the development and maintenance of supportive relationships that help people access what they need to thrive.

Doing Data Differently

Through this exercise of bringing together information held across Scottish Government and partner organisations relating to The Promise, several areas have emerged which will require data development work to build a further understanding of progress and outcomes.

This initial iteration of the framework is the beginning of ongoing work, aiming to do data differently. As set out in The Promise, there are challenges in the current landscape where, quantitative measures do not always tell the full story of progress that is being made on the ground, nor the experiences of Scotland’s population with care experience. The Scottish Government will continue to work in collaboration with COSLA and The Promise Scotland, to fill in the gaps that cannot be reached through existing data sources.

Alongside quantitative data development, a key aim of the Promise Stories of Progress will be to expand on the available qualitative data that will help us to understand whether people are feeling a difference. A set of “What matters” questions, have been developed by The Promise Scotland, which could be used as a guide for this work. The questions were developed using evidence collected during the Independent Care Review to formulate questions that would answer whether changes were being felt by children, young people and families. The aim is to use experiential data to build a rich picture of voices and experiences in the system in line with what The Promise tells us is essential for transformational change.

The Promise Collective

We know there is already a lot of work going on across Scotland to improve the lives of children and families. For The Promise to be kept, we recognise that we must play a key role in alignment and cohesion across this landscape and ensure that all policies, programmes, and investments are joined up and focused on the things that really matter to children and families.

Similarly, data, information and evidence must reflect what matters and be used to inform decision making at every level. The Promise Collective, co-chaired with The Promise Scotland and COSLA, was established to support alignment and cohesion of activities including progress monitoring, bringing together agencies and third sector organisations from across Scotland who have a role to play in keeping The Promise.

The Promise Collective was first convened in June 2022, co-chaired by The Promise Scotland, COSLA and The Scottish Government. Membership includes CELCIS, Who Cares?

Scotland and the Improvement Service. The focus of the group has progressed over the two-year period to consider the development of monitoring processes. Joint working on this has been supported by the Verity House Agreement.

In 2024, The Promise Collective has widened further to bring together the work of organisations including, the Care Inspectorate, Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to embed The Promise aims into improvement work across agencies.

The Promise Collective provides a strong framework of partnership working and sharing of information and activity underway across organisations to monitor and report progress. This includes connecting activities through corporate parenting duties; sharing of information and best practice to support improvement activity; and identifying opportunities for further joint working and collaboration.





Part 6

Governance And Partnership Working

Delivering The Promise requires major systems change. We have been clear that the Scottish Government must and will lead from the front, but success relies on good partnership and collaboration. It is clear that the organisational will to keep The Promise is high across our public and third sectors. In demonstrating this many organisations have developed their structures and their governance to ensure that activities and corporate parenting duties are appropriately delivered.

National Governance

In confirming the ongoing commitment to keep The Promise the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, Natalie Don-Innes MSP was appointed in April 2023. This provides a dedicated Ministerial focus to deliver the change required by the Independent Care Review and reports directly to the First Minister.

In addition, the cross-portfolio commitment has been further strengthened by the establishment of a dedicated **Cabinet Sub-Committee on The Promise**. Announced as part of the Programme for Government in September 2023 the Cabinet Sub-Committee and aims to meet four times per year.

Its purpose is to explore in greater detail progress on keeping The Promise and decision making on key issues during the life of the programme. It provides the opportunity to direct and support; to provide a route for prioritisation, influence and challenge decision making to introduce the change required to improve the outcomes for children, young people, adults and families with care experience.

Across the Civil Service structure, The Promise is being implemented as a major national change programme. This commitment sits across Ministerial portfolios and across a broad range of teams and Directorates. The oversight of progress is guided through a **Promise Programme Board** chaired by the Director of Children and Families and draws its membership from Directors across the Scottish Government.

The importance of joint working between National and Local Government is essential and the **Verity House Agreement** signed in June 2023 provides a strengthened context for this joint working. This relationship has supported the development and agreement of The **Promise Progress Framework** and strengthens the relationship between the **Scottish Government Promise Programme Board** and the **Local Government Promise Programme Board**.

The Scottish Government continues to work with partners across the public sector to identify areas for joint working and to share and learn from the information we hold and the activities we are respectively leading. This work continues through:

- The **Promise Collective** which will work with a broad range of organisations responsible for delivering The Promise to develop and monitor the Promise Progress Framework;
- the **National Leadership Group** and the **Children Services Planning Strategic Leads Network**
- as well as ongoing engagement directly across policy activities and themed partnerships.

National Accountability and Direction

At a national level the **Oversight Board** reports annually on progress and in so doing holds to account the activities of the Scottish Government, local government and partners across Scotland. This independent overview informed by the lived experience of members is highly valuable in ensuring the actions that we are taking are on track and are delivering the impact required.

In January 2024 there have been changes in the membership of the **Oversight Board** with new members joining and existing members stepping down as a result of the end of their 3 year tenure in post.

The Promise Scotland is the organisation funded solely by Scottish Government to work across all partners to help drive the change and overcome the barriers to progress. In September 2022, Fraser McKinlay was appointed as Chief Executive of the organisation and shortly after the Governance Board to oversee the running of the organisation was reaffirmed. **Directors of The Promise Scotland.**

Children's Services Plans

Children's Services Planning is Scotland's legislative approach to collaborative strategic planning and delivery of local services and support, so these are delivered in a way which achieves national priorities and meets local needs, and which results in improved wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and families living in each area. Children's Services Planning duties are set out in Part 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and supporting statutory guidance.

Each local authority and health board must work collaboratively with specified service providers (such as integration joint boards) other public bodies, the third sector, and children, young people and families themselves, to develop their Children's Services Plan (CSP). Each Children's Services Planning Partnership (CSPP) has a multi-agency strategic governance group of local senior leaders with budgetary decision-making, who are responsible for overseeing local delivery of Children's Services Planning duties across adult and children's services. This includes publishing an annual report to demonstrate what progress has been made across partners to improve outcomes for children, young people and families living in that area through the delivery of services, support and improvement activity.

Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPP's) are responsible for local collective leadership of a whole system approach to safeguard, support and promote wellbeing, so this upholds children's rights, embeds Getting it right for every child, delivers holistic whole family support, and drives local action to keep The Promise as well as tackling inequality and poverty.

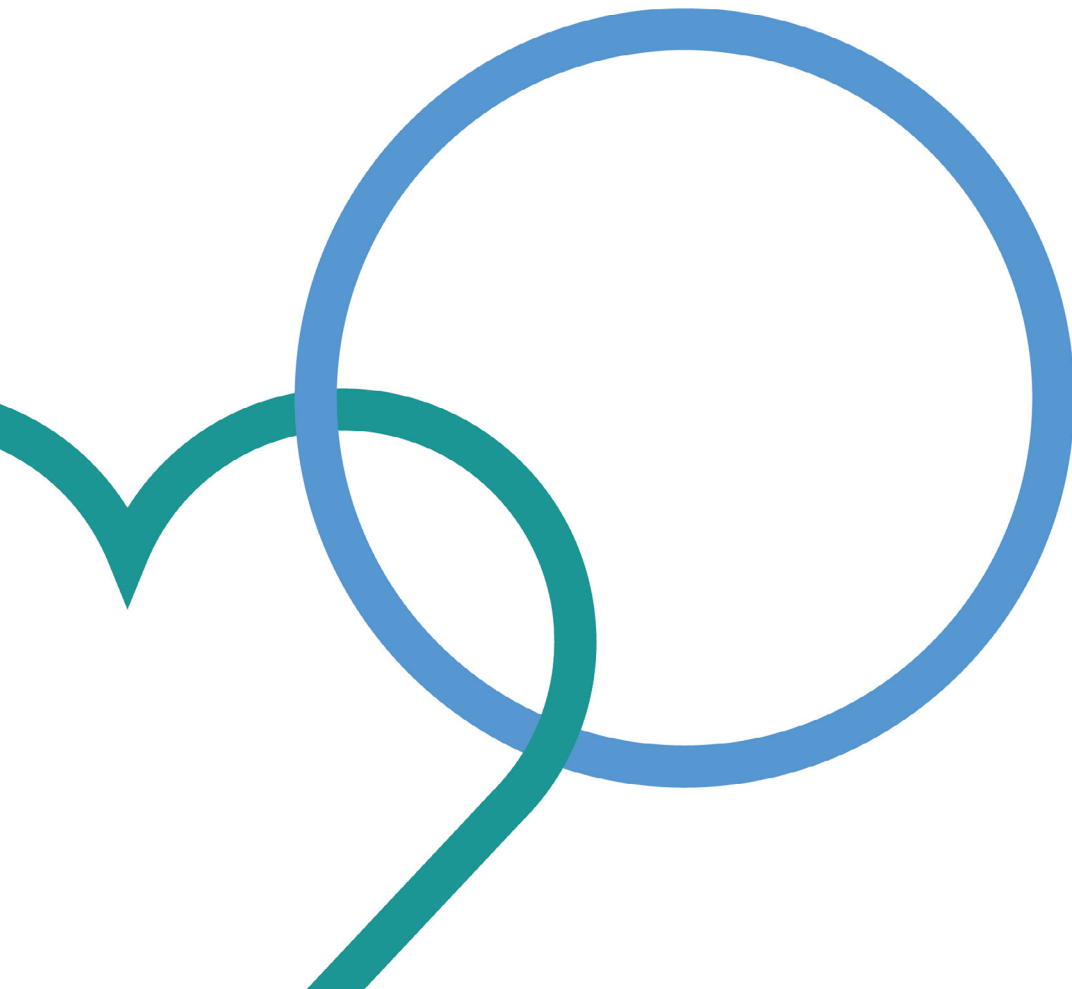
The Children's Services Planning (CSP) Strategic Leads Network promotes collaboration and delivery of improvement activity between and across CSPPs, Scottish Government, and key stakeholders, with an aim of strengthening the development, impact, and accountability of Children's Services Planning arrangements across Scotland. The CSP Strategic Leads Network may, where required, escalate issues for resolution or make recommendations which inform decision-making and consideration by the Children and Families National Leadership Group (C&F NLG), as well as responding to requests from the C&FNLG and Ministers, to support and deliver action required to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

East Lothian CSPP Collaborative Partnership

East Lothian CSPP is one of three collaborative partnerships (East Ayrshire, East Lothian and Glasgow City) which we are working with to accelerate plans and provide local learning that can be shared nationally. These CSPPs are part of the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding National Support for Local Delivery, a package of activity aimed at supporting local transformation.

With the support of the National Team, East Lothian colleagues are working with partners and communities on the ground to start to co-produce the cultures, structures and behaviours needed across the CSPP to support the transformational WFWF work.

This support has enabled East Lothian to build an understanding of what it takes to achieve change across the different levels – from strategic thinking to delivering services.





Part 7

Detailed Review of Progress Against our Actions and Commitments

To mirror the approach set out in The Promise and the structure of The Promise Implementation Plan, updates on activity across Scottish Government are presented against each of the four stated aims.

1. **Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support And Support For Our Care Experienced Children, Young People And Adults**
2. **A Good Childhood For Our Children And Young People**
3. **Creating The Right Scaffolding**
4. **Building Capacity**

As detailed in previous chapters our work to track the progress of delivering The Promise is underpinned by our theory of change, which identified the primary drivers, secondary drivers, and activities which need to be undertaken across Scotland to realise the vision of The Promise.

The Promise Progress Framework builds on the theory of change to create a link between how these activities are feeding into the vision for change and better understand how this work is impacting the experiences and outcomes of the

care experienced community. Going forward, the Framework will tell the story of change and how these changes are impacting the outcomes we need to improve.

Alignment with the National Performance Framework and Children, Young People and Families Wellbeing Outcomes Framework will ensure we are understanding whether the care experienced community is getting what we all need to thrive, and how this work is contributing to Scotland's overall aims.

In this part of the plan we provide an update on progress against each of the actions and commitments that were presented by the Scottish Government in The Promise Implementation Plan published in March 2022.

This demonstrates progress towards targeted activities and initiatives; policy and legislative change; investment in services; and support through universal service provision. While some of the activities will support change and improvement in particular areas it is the sum of all the actions that we take that will truly impact the change that keeping The Promise requires to collectively drive our national commitment to improve the lives of children, young people, adults and families with care experience.



Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support and Support For Our Care Experienced Children, Young People and Adults

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Wellbeing Funding

We are committed to investing £500m in Whole Family Wellbeing to improve holistic family support so that families get the right support, in the right way and at the right time.

STATUS

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme aims to enable and support the system change required at local Children’s Service Planning Partnership (CSPP) level to deliver holistic family support so that families can access the help they need, where and when needed. This is a transition fund, which is focused on delivering the system changes required to shift investment towards early intervention and prevention activities.

Since 2022-23, £50m per annum has been allocated to support activity focused on:

- providing funding direct to CSPPs to build capacity for change and test and scale transformational practice;
- providing national support for local change, including 3 collaborative partnerships with CSPPs to explore learning about what will enable this system change;
- building a co-ordinated cross-portfolio approach to delivering system change.

Going in to 2024-25, we have maintained this commitment to spend, allowing us to continue the programme of activity which has been established across a range of workstreams. In particular, it maintains our multi-year commitment of £32m to Children’s Service Planning Partnerships for them to progress their transformation plans at local level.

The **Year 1 Programme evaluation** was published on 31 January 2024. Further case study examples, including information about projects we have funded as part of a cross Scottish Government approach to system change, are detailed in our **online Knowledge Hub**. In the Programme for Government 2023/4 the commitment was made to publish our Whole Family Wellbeing investment approach to supporting the provision of preventative, holistic family support. This is presented in **Part 4**.

COMMITMENT

The Promise Partnership Fund

We will continue to support early intervention through investing in The Promise Partnership Fund until 2024-25 ensuring alignment with the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding.

We will continue to ensure alignment to our Tackling Child Poverty goals and that this transformational change delivers the person centred family support needed to tackle child poverty.

STATUS

In 2022 the Scottish Government appointed Corra to administer £12 million (£4m p.a.) through The Promise Partnership Fund from December 2022 until March 2025.

To date this has helped over 100 organisations and local authorities across the country to take steps towards implementing The Promise, focussing on supporting the care sector, workforce, helping brothers and sisters stay together, and moving on from care.

Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support and Support For Our Care Experienced Children, Young People and Adults

The organisations supported range from third sector organisations, local authorities, including Health and Social Care Partnerships and NHS Boards, universities and Police Scotland. A number of the projects involve collaboration across sectors and organisations and show how joint working can lead to wider change. Some examples of projects supported by The Promise Partnership Fund are included in **Part 2**.

family poverty, improve learning and build skills across Scotland. The fund supports third sector organisations who work with children and families to ensure that sustained, high quality support is available. The Promise is embedded as one of the main focuses and key policy priorities in the fund by way of supporting organisations who are providing services to young people with care experience and their families.

COMMITMENT

Access to financial advice

Adult Learning and Empowering Communities (CYPFEI & ALEC) Fund

We will, from April 2023 introduce a new third sector fund which will replace the Children, Young People, Families Early Intervention and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities (CYPFEI & ALEC) Fund.

COMMITMENT

Access to financial advice

Advice in Accessible Settings

We will invest £10 million over the Parliament to increase access to advice services in accessible settings through Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships, other health settings and community hubs and education settings giving people the opportunity to access holistic advice in a place they are comfortable visiting.

STATUS

The Scottish Government has committed to continue the Children, Young People, Families Early Intervention and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities funding (CYPFEI & ALEC) until March 2025. In addition, the budget has been increased (2023/25) by a further £6 million to support 22 additional third sector organisations since July 2023 under the new Children, Young People, Families and Adult Learning (CYPFAL) third sector fund which is also committed until March 2025.

CYPFEI & ALEC has provided over £106m core funding to 115 organisations since 2016 to deliver support that tackles inequalities, child and

STATUS

The Scottish Government has committed over £4.7m in total since 2021 to the Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships, and committed a further £2.5m in 2023-25 to the Advice in Accessible Settings Fund delivered by Advice UK. This funding supports 32 partnerships delivering debt, welfare, and income maximisation advice in health, community, and education settings.

From July 2023 to June 2024 there were over £7.5m of financial gains recorded for the total of over 5,500 people supported with over 4,000 clients recorded as belonging to one of the six priority family group households. Over

Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support and Support For Our Care Experienced Children, Young People and Adults

£700,000 of financial gains were directly related to children, for school meal vouchers, Educational Maintenance Allowance, Scottish Child Payment, school clothing grants, and charitable grants from children’s charities.

Along with investment in the Welfare Advice Health Partnerships there is now significant accessible household financial advice available across Scotland. Alongside investment in the WAHP as set out below there is now significant accessible household financial advice available across Scotland.

COMMITMENT

Access to financial advice

Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships & Money Talk Team

We will expand Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships, placing money advisors in up to 150 GP practices in some of Scotland’s most deprived areas. We plan to expand this to other health settings and community hubs and to expand on pilot local partnership approaches providing advice in education settings giving people the opportunity to access holistic advice in a place they are comfortable visiting.

We will simplify our financial advice services funding streams, including funding for Citizens Advice Scotland to enable a focus on outcomes rather than inputs, delivering joined up advice and support combining income maximisation and reducing household costs.

STATUS

To date, the Scottish Government has invested over £4.7m, since 2021, in a ‘test and learn’ programme of Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships (WAHP), supporting people to access advice in up to 180 GP practices across Scotland, with 150 targeted in the most deprived communities and 30 in remote, rural and island settings.

Through the initiative, embedded welfare rights advisors can provide regulated and accredited advice on a number of issues including social security entitlement, income maximisation, debt resolution, and employability. The objective of this funding has been to understand and demonstrate the effectiveness and positive impacts of this accessible advice model and to encourage participating local authorities and health and social care partnerships to consider this model of advice provision. The interim evaluation identified more than £17.9 million in financial gains for the over 13,000 service users (between July 2022 and October 2023).

Following successful completion of the ‘test and learn’ phase in 2024, the Scottish Government is seeking to support participating local authorities, through continued investment, to mainstream the WAHPs model over the medium-term.

A new, streamlined Money Talk Team service is now being delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland. The funding arrangement brings together three previously separate funding streams into one grant agreement. The service incorporates income maximisation, welfare and specialist debt advice delivered through one national website and telephone number as well as the CAB network of local bureaux. The service continues to provide holistic household financial advice across Scotland. In 2024-24 over 48,000 clients were

Keeping Families Together Through Whole Family Support and Support For Our Care Experienced Children, Young People and Adults

supported, including over 10,000 from Tackling Child Poverty priority family groups. Total client gains reached over £33.7 million and for priority family groups, this totalled over £9 million.

Funding for the Money Talk Team service continues in 2024/25.

COMMITMENT

Homelessness Prevention

We will implement the next phase of work to end homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland and invest a further £50 million over the current parliamentary term to continue this work.

We will continue to provide help with housing costs for those most in need through Discretionary Housing Payments and will put in place measures to mitigate the previous UK Government's benefit cap as fully as we can within the scope of devolved powers.

STATUS

We continue to work closely with COSLA and third sector partners to deliver our Ending Homelessness Together action plan, of which the delivery of our five prevention pathways for people at higher risk of homelessness is part. The five groups include care leavers and young people.

This is supported by providing a total of £100 million from our multi-year Ending Homelessness Together Fund to transform the homelessness system. This includes funding of £62.5 million (between 2018-25) to local authorities for development and implementation of their rapid rehousing transition plans to support people into settled accommodation and Housing First which provides settled accommodation with intensive support for people require it, with some local authorities operate a Housing First for youth programme targeted specifically for care leavers.

We also give local authorities £30.5 million annually specifically for their work to prevent homelessness, recognising that the best way to end homelessness is to stop it happening in the first place.

In 2023-24 we committed an additional £2 million of funding for local authorities to reduce the use of temporary accommodation. And we will invest over £90 million in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) in 2024-25 – an increase of over £6 million on 2023-24 – which enables us to mitigate the previous UK Government's bedroom tax and benefit cap.

The Minister for Housing has also convened a Ministerial Oversight Group on Homelessness which brings together Ministers from across a range of Scottish Government areas to promote joined up working, strategic funding and to drive forward the ethos of a shared responsibility to prevent homelessness.

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COMMITMENT

Scottish Recommended Allowance for Kinship and Foster Carers

We will set a Recommended National Allowance for foster and kinship allowances. This investment will mean that no matter which area of Scotland children are living in, their caregivers will receive at least the Scottish Recommended Allowance to care for them.

STATUS

The Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) for kinship and foster carers was announced on 29 August 2023. Funded by an additional £16 million from the Scottish Government, the new allowance has benefitted more than 9,000 children. Introduction of the payment means every eligible foster and kinship carer will receive at least a standard, national allowance which recognises the valuable support they provide, no matter where they live.

Following agreement with COSLA, this marks the first time a set rate, which all local authorities must pay, has been introduced across Scotland. The weekly allowances, which will be backdated to 1 April 2023, are:

- 0 to 4 year-olds: £168.31
- 5 to 10 year-olds: £195.81
- 11 to 15 year-olds: £195.81
- 16-years-old and over: £268.41

The Scottish Government has committed to a review of the implementation of the SRA to start in the autumn of 2024.

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Approach to Children & Young People’s Mental Health

We will support mental health pathways and services for vulnerable children and young people. Aligned to the work of The Promise, these pathways will ensure that support is available and accessible to those who need it, at the right time. This will also work to ensure there are no gaps in provision of mental health support.

STATUS

As highlighted within the 2023 **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** and accompanying **Delivery Plan**, the Scottish Government and COSLA have launched a new Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health (JSB) with a remit spanning pre-conception, the perinatal period, early years, children and young people (up to 26 for care leavers), their families and carers.

Building on the recommendations of predecessor groups and as part of a whole system approach, the JSB will consider how gaps in provision of crisis support and children and families in vulnerable situations can best be addressed, alongside work on prevention and early intervention. The JSB will work to an Outcomes Framework to support and frame its work. This framework is intended to inform actions that the JSB may plan, and the type of monitoring and evaluation that may be useful, feasible and proportionate. It links across many related policy areas and supports the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy outcomes, as well as the National Performance Framework.

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The **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan** (2023-25) commits to funding the enhancement of crisis and distress services for children and young people, giving particular consideration to the needs of children and young people with care experience or on the edges of care.

Going forward we will work closely with stakeholders to ensure that a range of supports are in place to meet the needs of children and young people. We are also seeking to enhance the focus on mental health within Children's Services Planning processes, including the co-development of national briefing. The review of Part 3 Children's Services Planning Statutory guidance will provide a further opportunity to strengthen content on mental health/mental wellbeing. This is anticipated to be completed over 2024 with consultation in early 2025 and publication of revised statutory guidance by June 2025.

Joint work to support the mental health in schools digital resource, school counselling services and whole school approaches to mental health, will continue to address the spectrum of mental health and wellbeing needs in schools, with a new digital resource in development for primary school aged children to support coping and resilience skills.

We have fully delivered on the Programme for Government commitment to support colleges and universities to introduce more than 80 extra counsellors to support their students' mental health with an investment of almost £16 million over four years since 2019/20. Additionally, we are investing over £3.2 million in academic year 23/24 in a Student Mental Health Transition Fund to help institutions diversify their support offering to students and integrate with local services. We are also consulting with stakeholders in developing a Student Mental Health Action Plan.

COMMITMENT

Island Dimension

We will continue to work with NHS Boards, local authorities and Health and Social Care Partnerships to ensure that there is fair, accessible health and social care for those on islands, as set out in our National Islands Plan (2019). We will also continue to identify and promote good practice to enable the improvement of services in rural Scotland and across Scotland's islands.

STATUS

The **Rural Scotland Data Dashboard**, which supports development of the Rural Delivery Plan by the **Ministerial Working Group**, and the **Scottish Islands Data Dashboard**, which presents data categorised by the strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan, were published in December 2023. The dashboards are a compilation of evidence on Scotland's rural and islands communities, drawn from a range of sources. They provide baseline and trend data to aid understanding of the extent to which Scottish Government outcomes are being achieved in rural and islands areas and will contribute to identifying priorities and gaps.

A vision, strategic objectives, and ambition statements are being drafted, and key performance indicators selected, for the Rural Delivery Plan. The Plan will gather evidence from stakeholders and communities via a review of public consultations since 2021, and we will connect with a broad programme of existing engagement to share information and developments with stakeholders.

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We will continue to monitor progress through the Rural Scotland Data Dashboard and the Scottish Islands Data Dashboard. The dashboards contain data on life expectancy, satisfaction with services, general health, diet, alcohol and tobacco use, suicide rates and experience of care.

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Approach to Drug & Support

Our whole family approach to drug and alcohol services is supported by Scottish Government annual investment of £3.5 million over the next 5 years. Additional funding such as the £3 million Children and Families Fund administered through the Corra Foundation, is in place to improve support for children, young people and families impacted by drug use, and ensure all children, young people and families have access to services.

STATUS

£3 million continues to be available to Alcohol and Drug Partnerships to support local implementation of the delivery framework. 23 projects have been funded to date through the Children and Families fund administered by Corra.

As part of the development of drugs and alcohol policy for Early Interventions for Children and Young People we have considered the needs of care experienced and looked after young people. We are working with Public Health Scotland to develop a National Consensus Statement for reducing harms in young people affected by substances, as well as developing National Standards for young people affected by substance use.

The Early Interventions for Children and Young People working group includes members who work with young people with care experience. We recently engaged young people in a co-design process, and the outcomes from this engagement will be used to develop standards of support for young people with problematic drug or alcohol use. During this process, we engaged with various cohorts of young people, which included young people who have lived and living experience of being in care.

The Scottish Government are supporting Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and local partners to implement the delivery framework. We are developing implementation support for local partners which includes family inclusive practice pathways at an operational level across the alcohol and drug workforce; national quality standards; and monitoring and evaluation processes. Survey results provided a national baseline and an understanding of local progress.

- Families on the Frontline was a two-day national conference held March 2023 which brought families and services from across Scotland together.
- The National Development Programme for Family Inclusive Practice commenced June 2023 – the learning will support other local areas develop pathways to meet the needs of their families, free training to support this will be made available to ADPs.
- A Whole Family Approach/ Family Inclusive Practice (WFA/FIP) Test event for ADPs and stakeholders was held in Highland, and a deep dive is underway into the outcomes from this event to shape a future event offer and implementation support offer to ADPs.
- Phoenix Futures officially opened their National Specialist Families Service, known as Harper House, in November 2022.

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- Public Health Scotland's most recent report published in June 2024 showed that between October 2023 and March 2024, 21 placements were approved at Harper House, with 32 placements approved overall in the 2023-24 financial year. Officials are continuing to work closely with Phoenix Futures to raise awareness of Harper House and to support with localised blockers where appropriate, with the aim of working towards full capacity and utilisation by 2025-26.
- Aberlour Childcare Trust officially opened the first of their Mother and Child Houses in Dundee in January 2023, with the second house due to be officially opened in Falkirk on 2 September 2024.
- Aberlour's Dundee Mother and Child House has maintained occupancy levels since opening; supporting 8 placements with 8 women and 8 children in its first year .. Cowan Grove is also now embedded in Dundee's Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation pathway.

Implementation progress survey will be issued to ADPs in autumn 2024 to identify progress and gaps for national support priorities. We will also develop Families Standards monitoring and evaluation.

Harper House are progressing their aim to be a Centre of Excellence for whole family interventions in Scotland. A partnership is in place with Liverpool John Moore's University undertaking research focusing on outcomes and impact, to support with final reporting in 2025/26.

Aberlour commissioned the Social Value Lab to conduct an external evaluation into the impact of Cowan Grove following its first operational year. The final report was completed and shared with Scottish Government in July 2024.

We are also working across government, as well as with key stakeholders and women with lived experience to develop guidance to support the wellbeing women who use substances, and their babies, in the perinatal period.

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Approach to Drug & Alcohol Support

Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP)

On 17 April 2024, the Scottish Parliament voted to continue minimum unit pricing and increase the minimum price per unit of alcohol to 65p

Alcohol Advertising

We are taking forward further action to tackle alcohol harm including considering potential restrictions on alcohol marketing and advertising following the consultation that closed in 2023.

STATUS

Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP)

A key strategy for tackling alcohol-related harm in Scotland was the introduction of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in 2018, setting the minimum cost of one unit of alcohol to 50p. Since then, the Scottish Parliament has agreed legislation brought forward by Ministers to continue the effect of the MUP legislation beyond 30 April 2024 and to raise the level it is set at to 65p per unit,

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aiming to increase its public health benefits. An independent evaluation of MUP found that, during the period it was reviewed, MUP was estimated to have reduced alcohol-related deaths by 13.4% and likely to have reduced hospital admissions by 4.1% compared to what would have happened if MUP had not been in place.

The Scottish Government is currently considering whether there should be an agreed process at set intervals to review MUP and the price of MUP in future. As part of this industry, business and all key stakeholders will be engaged to consider the potential impacts of implementing an uprating mechanism at specific time intervals might be.

Alcohol Advertising

The Scottish Government is fully committed to improving public health and reducing the health risks faced by young people, including by considering how to reduce their exposure to alcohol marketing – one of the World Health Organization’s three ‘best buys’ to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm. Research has consistently shown that exposure to marketing is associated with an increased likelihood that children will start to drink or – if they already drink – drink more.

That is why we consulted on proposals to restrict alcohol advertising and promotion in 2022/23 and are continuing to engage with public health stakeholders and business organisations with an interest in alcohol advertising to ensure it strikes the right balance in achieving its public health aims.

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Approach to Children & Young People’s Mental Health

Joint Strategic Board

We will, through The Joint Strategic Board for Child and Family Mental Health, oversee reforms.

Community Services

An additional £15 million to local authorities to fund new and enhanced supports and services for children and young people aged 5-24 in the communities; and an additional £15 million will be provided in 2022/23 to fund the continuation of these services.

Crisis Support

We will ensure crisis support is available 24/7 to children and young people, filling any gaps that exist in telephone and text crisis services for 5-24 year olds their families and carers.

STATUS

The Joint Strategic Board for Child and Family Mental Health (JSB) is taking forward crisis support as one of its four key priority areas. As outlined above, the JSB is building on the recommendations made by the Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board to consider how the gaps in provision of crisis support can best be addressed, including gaps in digital services. Additionally, the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan (2023-25)** commits to funding the enhancement of crisis and distress services for Children and Young People.

Funding of £64,000 has been awarded to Medics Against Violence for the expansion of their Youth Navigators programme. The programme supports

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young people aged 12-16 arriving at Emergency Departments who are experiencing crisis, and the funding also allows for a pilot of the programme in a school.

The JSB considered the crisis support priority area in its first full meeting in February 2024. It is anticipated that JSB will stand up implementation group(s) to support this work. The Board will have a strategic overview of mental health work spanning preconception, the perinatal period, parent-infant relationships, early years (up to 5), children and young people (5-24 year olds or 26 years for care leavers), their families and carers – with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Through the joint Scottish Government/COSLA Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan, we have committed to fund delivery of community-based mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people, with a further £15 million committed for 24/25. This now supports over 300 services; with local authorities reporting that over 58,000 children, young people and family members accessed this support in the first half of 2023.

COMMITMENT

Whole Family Approach to Children & Young People's Mental Health

Mental Health Pathways

Supporting mental health pathways and services for vulnerable children and young people. Aligned to the work of The Promise, these pathways will ensure that support is available and accessible to those who need it, at the right time. This will also work to ensure there are no gaps in provision of mental health support.

STATUS

Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health

The Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health (JSB) is focused on identifying key areas for improvement in the mental health and wellbeing support available to children and young people in vulnerable situations, while reviewing data and evidence and the views of children and young people with care experience to support this. The group used care experience as a lens by which to explore system changes, which can impact on and lead to improvement for all children and young people in vulnerable situations.

The Board is taking forward support for children and families in vulnerable situations (e.g. with care experience) as one of its four key priority areas building on the recommendations made by the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board to consider how the gaps in provision and barriers to accessing support for children and families with care experience or on the edges of care.

The JSB considered the support for children and young people and families in vulnerable situations (with a particular focus on children and young people with care experience) priority area at its second meeting in March 2024. It is anticipated that JSB will stand up implementation groups to support the work to further all priority areas and that all implementation groups will give consideration to The Promise. Further, there are likely to be specific implementation groups considering the needs of those in care, or with care experience.

Additionally, the **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan (2023-25)** commits to giving specific consideration to children and young people with care experienced or on the edges of care when developing any expansion of crisis and

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distress services for children and young people.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Neurodevelopmental Services for Children and Young People

In 2023/24, we allocated funding of £55.5 million via the Mental Health Outcomes Framework to improve the quality and delivery of mental health and psychological services for all. This is on top of the £36.6 million that Boards received in 2022-23. In 2024/25, the Scottish Government has directly allocated £120 million to NHS Boards and Integrated Joint Boards through a new Enhanced Mental Health Outcomes Framework in 2024/25. The Framework focuses on embedding increased capacity in CAMHS as well as supporting improvements across a range of mental health and psychological services in line with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Additionally, Scottish Government has allocated over £3.4 million in 2024/25 to NHS Boards to support delivery of regional service provision of the CAMHS Service Specification. This funding will work towards delivery of the first of three regional Intensive Psychiatric Care Units (IPCU) for Adolescents; Learning Disability, Forensic and Secure Care CAMHS pathways; and Intensive Home Treatment Team services.

The priorities for the funding for 2024/25 are to continue delivering improvements in CAMHS, psychological therapies, eating disorders and neurodevelopmental services, as well as ongoing innovation and service reform.

This funding continues to contribute to:

- Clearing long waits for CAMHS and meeting the waiting times standards.
- Implementing and delivering local elements of the national CAMHS service specification, including improvement in provision for those with eating disorders, by March 2026.

- Supporting improvements in both neurodevelopmental services for children and young people and eating disorder services.

Neurodevelopmental Services for Children & Young People

We are supporting boards to implement the National Neurodevelopmental Specification. As part of this, we funded five tests of change which are focusing on implementing various aspects of the Specification. Four of the Neurodevelopmental Tests of Change continued until March 2024. So far, through the Tests of Change, we have gathered a good understanding of key challenges and barriers faced in implementing various aspects of the Neurodevelopmental Specification including challenges around: funding, multi-agency working, role of education and workforce more generally.

The Neurodevelopmental Tests of Change concluded in March 2024 and reported to Scottish Government in May 2024. We aim to share learning and information from this final stage with all appropriate stakeholders to support wider implementation of the specification and inform future policy development. We are also considering how best to share the tools and resources which have been developed as a result of the Tests of Change so that these can be utilised and replicated in other areas of Scotland, where appropriate. We intend to revisit the specification to ensure it continues to be relevant and meets the needs of children and their families. Progress with implementation of the National CAMHS and Neurodevelopmental Service Specifications will be fed in to JSB updates.

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COMMITMENT

Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

The Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board 2020-2021 set out its commitment to keep The Promise by ensuring its work is:

- informed by lived experience at a strategic and operational level with family members being meaningfully involved in decision-making.
- supports positive relationships within families and creating opportunities for positive relationships where it is not possible for children to stay with their families.
- actively supports the development of relationships within families and with the community and professional systems involved, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision making and care
- is accompanied by responsive help, support and accountability to enable support to be accessed and utilised to its fullest potential.

STATUS

Following the conclusion of the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board, and the associated Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board (JDB) and recognising the ongoing need to support infants, children, young people and families with their mental health and wellbeing, COSLA and the Scottish Government are now progressing this work through the new Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health (JSB).

In addition, the Scottish Government has recently opened a new round of the Perinatal and Infant

Mental Health Fund. This fund of £1.5 million over 18 months is for charities providing support to pregnant women, new mums and their families to expand and enhance their mental health and wellbeing services. Over 10,000 parents, expectant parents and infants have been supported by existing funded organisations since 2019. The new round of funding will start from October 2024.

The Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge was published in 2023 and supports the recognition and understanding of the voice of all infants.

Currently there are 13 health boards in Scotland with new Infant Mental Health services. To support this the Perinatal Mental Health Network Scotland have published an IMH Service Development Guide and role descriptors for Parent-Infant Therapists. Infant mental health service provision is part of a wider evaluation being conducted by PHS which is due to start reporting in spring/summer 2024.

Awareness raising has been a key part of the Infant Mental Health work with two runs of a social media campaign using film and images to highlight the importance of early interactions. This campaign was accompanied by the launch of the Wellbeing for Wee Ones Hub on the Parent Club website, supporting parents to gain an understanding of their infant's emotional wellbeing from an early stage. We have since built on this work with some filming focused around how items in the Baby Box can be used to promote attachment and infant mental health.

We have developed a suite of Infant Mental Health focused content on the Parent Club website on a set of pages called Wellbeing for Wee Ones. Since the infant mental health campaign launched in February 2021, there has been over 100,000 visits to the infant mental health pages on the Parent Club website. During the 2021 and 2022 campaigns, we engaged with over 23,000 people via Parent Club social media posts. The Wellbeing for Wee Ones campaign re-run took place from October to December 2023.

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We have made the Solihull Online programmes accessible to every parent across Scotland, providing evidence based information on relationships and child development all the way through to 18 years. It has been accessed by over 25,000 parents and professionals. An increase of 6,000 since 2022.

One of the priorities of the Joint Strategic Board is mental health support during pregnancy and the early years. Prioritising this area of work aims to further enhance cross-organisation working and further develop support, across the full range from preconception to 5 years with specific focus on the perinatal period (preconception to 1 year) and during infancy (up to third birthday) which are both key life stages. The work and impact of the Child and Family Mental Health Joint Strategic Board will be considered through the JSB’s Outcomes framework.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Disabled Children & Young People

Self-Directed Support

In March 2021 we published a framework of standards to ensure consistency of outcomes and approaches in self-directed support practice across Scotland. We will review the statutory guidance which accompanies the Social Care (Self-Directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 in order to reflect learning and developments since the legislation was introduced, and to ensure services are delivered flexibly in a way that reflects the specific situations of everyone who receives Self Directed Support.

STATUS

The **Self-Directed Support (SDS) Statutory Guidance** was updated in November 2022. This is a major update of the guidance which prioritises a human rights approach and the rights and responsibilities of duty bearers under the provisions of the SDS Act 2013 (and related legislation). The update incorporates content on children, families and instructing local authorities to ensure that they are allowing social workers sufficient autonomy to exercise professional judgement regarding provision of SDS to children, their families, young carers and those in transition, and referencing appropriate other legislation which applies. Concerning disability, the guidance emphasises the mitigation of societal barriers placed that disabled children and their families may face with respect to their access to services, and to give those children the opportunities to live lives which are as normal as possible. A **SDS Improvement Plan** builds on the update of this guidance with effect from April 2023.

The Improvement Plan 2023-27 was developed jointly with COSLA and the SDS National Collaboration and was published in June 2023, and an annual progress report is due in the summer of 2024. The overarching aim of the SDS Improvement Plan is to support and enable people of all ages (including children) to achieve the outcomes that are important to them, to lead full and meaningful lives, and to participate in and contribute to the economy and society.

The activities within the Improvement Plan will be supported with a Scottish Government contribution of over £7.5m for 2023/24, comprising a package of grants implemented by Social Work Scotland, In Control Scotland, Inspiring Scotland, and the ALLIANCE. This includes a revision and relaunch of the Support in the Right Direction programme, which will commence for three years from April 2024. The Improvement Plan 2023-27 annual progress report for year one will be published in the summer of 2024.

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COMMITMENT

Access to Early Learning & Childcare

Maximise Uptake of the Existing Offer

We will maximise uptake of the existing offer of funded ELC for eligible 2 year olds

We will embed learning from the roll out of the Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs) roles and from our investment in the Family Learning Scotland Programme.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continues to work with the Improvement Service to support local authorities with maximising the current offer. This include supporting local authorities to access 'Datapipeline' (the online platform through which local authorities can access data on households in their area with an eligible, or nearly eligible, two-year-old) and make best use of the data and identify improvements with other eligible families who are not part of the data share e.g. children and families with care experience.

We are developing an Early Learning & Childcare Outcomes Framework which along with the establishment of a new Education Assurance Board will ensure greater local accountability for improvement.

People were chosen as the delivery partner for Families Learning Together.

We plan to evaluate the impact of the Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs) programme in 2024-25. We are developing an Early Learning & Childcare Outcomes Framework will ensure greater local accountability for improvement.

COMMITMENT

Implementing GIRFEC

We reaffirmed our commitment to GIRFEC policy in September 2019 and we continue to work with practitioners and other stakeholders to refresh national guidance materials to support consistent effective practice across all children's services.

Policy and Practice Guidance

The Scottish Government is strongly committed to GIRFEC and is updating Policy and Practice Guidance to provide organisations and practitioners with confidence and clarity to continue to deliver this approach.

We will implement our vision and principles focused specifically on children with, or on the edges of, care experience, building on the GIRFEC principles and values, and principles of holistic family support. This work will contribute to the shared aims and wellbeing outcomes of the Children, Young People and Families Outcome Framework.

Children's Services Planning Partnerships and the Kinship Care Collaborative

We will continue our work with Children's Services Planning Partnerships and the Kinship Care Collaborative to improve delivery of holistic whole family support including through our work to:

- support pregnancy and maternal health and development through implementation of the guidance for schools on how to support young pregnant women/young parents to stay in school; and guidance on Healthy Relationships and consent.
- continue to support families through preventative health and care programmes, including maternity services, Family Nurse Partnership and health visiting, and initiatives designed for families and early years including: Baby Box, BookBug and Play, Talk, Read.

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- support families to access employment or education through provision of early years childcare; and increase financial assistance through doubling of the Scottish Child Payment and further increasing it to £25 by end 2022 when roll out to 6 – 15 year olds takes place. Scottish Child Payment was extended to under 16s and increased to £25 on 14 November 2022.
- support programmes like Intandem that provide scaffolding to support children and young people who are subject to a compulsory supervision order (or at-risk of becoming so), living at home or in kinship arrangements.

STATUS

Policy and Practice Guidance

In September 2022 the Scottish Government published **GIRFEC policy and practice guidance materials** (GIRFEC Policy Statement, practice guidance on Using the National Practice Model, the role of the named person and the role of the lead professional and information sharing, and statutory guidance on Assessment of Wellbeing).

In October 2023 we published the **GIRFEC Child's Plan Practice Statement** to communicate our current policy intention regarding the roles and responsibilities of practitioners involved with the development and monitoring of a non-statutory GIRFEC Child's Plan. This accompanies the suite of GIRFEC practice guidance produced in 2022.

Children, Young People and Families Outcome Framework

The GIRFEC guidance underpins our approaches to holistic family support and contributes to the shared aims and wellbeing outcomes of the Children, Young People and Families Outcome Framework. The GIRFEC multi-agency approach provides a framework to plan care and support

for children, young people and families across a range of services to help families meet their individual needs, to thrive and to stay together. The Outcomes Framework provides a consistent approach to measuring and evaluating effectiveness and impact on improved outcomes for children, young people, and their families. The national report on **Core Wellbeing Indicators** of the Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework was published in September 2023. Phase 2 CYPF Outcomes Framework includes further exploration of deep dive and developing data focused on more specific aspects of wellbeing, including care experience and family support with further detailed analysis of the core wellbeing indicators published with a focus on the impact of poverty on child and parental wellbeing.

GIRFEC Learning Network

The Scottish Government has also established a GIRFEC Learning Network – a forum in which effective practice can be shared between 'Getting it right for every child' leads across Scotland. It also provides a professional space where practitioners and leaders can identify common challenges with implementation of the values and principles of GIRFEC and how these can be overcome. This approach aligns with our response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendation to "strengthen the capacity of all relevant professionals for assessing and determining the best interests of the child and for giving it due weight as a primary consideration". The Network meets approximately every 8 weeks, with members driving the workplan of key areas for learning and development across the implementation of 'Getting it right for every child' principles into everyday practice. The Scottish Government will also work with network members to arrange regional learning events to facilitate discussion on GIRFEC implementation within local contexts and strengthen partnership working across local authorities and Health Boards.

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Children's Services Plans

The Scottish Government are currently undertaking the statutory review of Children's Services Plans. This includes a statutory review criteria which considers the extent to which each Children's Services Plan has detailed how partners in adult and children's services are working collaboratively to create and maintain effective Getting it Right for Every Child practice for individual children, young people and their families through local GIRFEC arrangements – the analysis and review will be completed with feedback provided to CSPP areas by April 2024 and a national report of themes and findings published by October 2024.

Children's Services Planning Partnerships and the Kinship Care Collaborative

As part of the ongoing work to support pregnancy and maternal health development the guidance for schools on how to support young pregnant women/young parents to stay in school; and guidance on Healthy Relationships and Consent for young people have been implemented. This is part of the wider work to support young pregnant parents through the Pregnancy and Parenthood

in Young People Strategy. The information leaflet aimed at young pregnant women/young parents in school was published in March 2023, on gov.scot and Young Scot. The leaflet was circulated round a range of stakeholders for further dissemination, Education Scotland are uploading it to their resource page shortly.

During 2024 we will continue to strengthen cross-policy links to GIRFEC implementation across the Children and Families Directorate and wider Scottish Government policy areas. This will include highlighting the alignment between the principles of GIRFEC and UNCRC incorporation into Scots Law.

We are also working in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland to support their development of GIRFEC e-learning resources for practitioners to increase confidence and support learning and development around the 'Getting it right for every child' multi-agency approach.



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COMMITMENT

Growing Up: Improving Health and Wellbeing

Universal Health Visiting Pathway

Every family in Scotland has access to preventative health services, which offer universal prevention, health promotion, and early intervention to families with young children. Available from pregnancy through to 5 years (school entry), with a scale of intensity proportionate to need.

Through the **Family Nurse Partnership** programme, young, first-time mothers aged 19 and under (and 20-24 in some areas, based on additional need) are entitled to support. We know that younger mothers are more likely to be care experienced or transitioning through care and the targeted home visiting programme building strong relationships with families, starting before the baby is born, provides intensive, relational based support to young mothers across Scotland.

To help support young mothers, and recognising that around 50% of mothers who have repeat child removal have had their first child at a very young age, we have published guidance for schools on how to support young pregnant women/young parents to stay in school; and guidance on **Key Messages for Young People on Healthy Relationships and Consent**. We are currently working with experts to develop guidance for children under 12, to help them have happy, consensual relationships and to help keep them safe from and to be able to identify abuse.

Ensuring the **Universal Health Visitor Pathway** is embedded and delivered in all Health Boards for children under 5 to deliver person centred care proportionate to need; and supporting the role of school nurses in improving health

outcomes for school aged children and young people up to 18 years of age as they transition through school.

Our ongoing support to every family across Scotland is continued through our national and universal programmes designed to give children the best possible start, including **Baby Box**; **Bookbug**; and our targeted **PlayTalkRead** programme, supporting parents and carers to develop positive relationships, form attachment and bond with their child from day one.

Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2024/2030

Play and the developmental benefits that come from social interaction and the importance of access to community facilities is recognised by The Promise. Delivering on children's right to play and building on our play strategy, we will deliver on our commitment to invest £60 million in renewing play parks across Scotland to ensure that all children have access to quality play in their own community.

STATUS

Scotland's **Universal Health Visiting Pathway** offers support to all of Scotland's young families from pre-birth until a child starts school. Where additional input is required, the pathway provides a gateway to other levels of Health Visiting provision and referrals to more specialised healthcare services. Health Boards are directed to deploy more health visitors to areas of socioeconomic deprivation. This allows health visitors more capacity to help those most in need. For young, first-time parents, the Family Nurse Partnership programme is provided pre-birth until their child reaches two.

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Up to 3,000 families per year are supported by the **Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)**, and over 11,000 have benefitted since the programme began in 2010. We are working with NHS Boards to widen the eligibility criteria so more people can benefit. All first-time mothers aged 21 and under and, where capacity allows, first time mothers under the age of 25, with care experience or from the most deprived communities will be offered FNP services by the end of 2024. This expansion will support up to an additional 500 families per year.

The guidance to support young mothers to remain in education was published in August 2021. This complements the key messages for young people on **Healthy Relationships and Consent** which were published for practitioners in May 2019. The Healthy Relationships and Consent for children guidance is still in development, with work ongoing to ensuring it is aligned to other Scottish Government work in the area, including the ongoing consultation on relationships, sexual health, and parenting education in schools. The guidance is now being revised to meet a need for parents and carers to have conversations with children.

The Universal Health Visiting Pathway is delivered in all of Scotland's Health Board Areas. As part of our commitment to ensuring that the Health Visiting service continues to deliver for families, we commissioned an evaluation of the Universal Health Visiting Pathway. The main phase 1 evaluation reports were published between December 2021 and June 2022. We will work with Health Board representatives and wider stakeholders to identify and consider appropriate next steps based on recommendations from the evaluation.

School nurses provide support to the school age population through an integrated care model within Education settings. The school nurse role was transformed in 2018 with a focus

on prevention, early intervention, and health promotion for the school aged population. Where more specialised support is required, school nurses can make referrals into other services ensuring children receive the correct care and support.

The **Best Start** programme for maternal and neonatal services in Scotland provides a continuity of carer for women with the most complex needs, developing trusting relationships throughout their pregnancy and birth.

Development of a Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2024-2030 is ongoing, which will include mention of The Promise within the overall narrative of the plan. The draft strategy is due to be published in the course of 2024.

Funding to support the renewal of Play Parks by our local authority partners has been agreed with COSLA Leaders. Funding has been allocated on the following basis: 2021/22 -£5 million; 2022/23 – £5 million ; 2023/24£10 million; 2024/25 – £15 million.

Going forward, the Family Nurse Partnership team will liaise with each board in early 2024 to gain insight what opportunity there is to progress expansion based on available resource and modelling of predicted clients. Although expansion to 21 year olds has paused in most Health Boards, this is due to available capacity being taken up by teenage clients. Boards are still delivering the programme to capacity. Monthly reports are provide to Scottish Government from health boards on the number of clients engaged on the FNP programme, including clients from the expanded age ranges, and available capacity. There is also supplemented by regular review and discussion with boards on projected capacity to support the commitments.

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COMMITMENT

Growing Up: Improving Health and Wellbeing

Health Assessment

We will ensure that all children with care experience receive a health assessment within 28 days of the Health Board being notified. Any ongoing care and treatment which is identified is an important first step in the support relationship and we are working with stakeholders to improve the consistency and quality of this initial assessment.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continue to engage with Health Boards/Health & Social Care Partnerships around the delivery of initial health assessments for looked after children. This work will continue with a view to identifying opportunities for improving health assessment delivery and the health outcomes of care experienced children.

COMMITMENT

Early Learning & Childcare

We will work to expand funded early learning and childcare for children aged 1 and 2, starting with low-income households within this Parliament.

STATUS

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 ensures our children in care are able to access funded early learning and childcare from age two. From August 2021, eligibility for the provision of funded early learning and childcare was expanded to include children of parents with care experience and importantly, once a child qualifies for early learning and childcare, they stay qualified. Building on what we have learned from the 1140 programme for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds, our work to develop our future funded offers of early learning and childcare will be strongly aligned to whole family wellbeing and holistic family support.

Early insight work around building a robust evidence base to inform the design of a new offer of funded Early Learning & Child Care for younger children was undertaken with reports published in 2022/23.

The focus in 2024/25 will be on building on early insights work including through early adopter community work in six local authorities and Whole Family Wellbeing Fund projects.

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COMMITMENT

National Hub for Child Death Reviews

STATUS

The National Hub for Child Death Reviews (CDR) has been in place since October 2021 and is conducting a review into the deaths of all live born children up to the date of their 18th birthday, or 26th birthday for care leavers who are in receipt of aftercare or continuing care at the time of their death. The aim of the National Hub is to ensure that a review is undertaken following the death of every child in Scotland and identify themes and trends via the use of standardised forms and processes for Health Boards and local authorities. The Hub's focus is to use evidence to inform practice to reduce the number of child and young people's deaths in Scotland and to report annually on its findings.

In March 2024 Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate published an overview of learning arising from the first year of CDR implementation **National Hub overview report: Year 1**. The Scottish Government will work with our partners in the National Hub to implement the 5 recommendations and to continue to share learning in order to reduce the number of preventable deaths and harm of children and young people.

Domestic Homicide and Suicide Review

In December 2022, the Scottish Government established a taskforce to provide national leadership for the development and implementation of a multi-agency domestic homicide and suicide review model for Scotland.

The domestic homicide and suicide review model aims to learn lessons following a death where abuse is suspected and to ensure a voice is given to those who have died and their family. The model will cover all children including those directly related to the victim of domestic abuse. Consultation and targeted engagement to inform the development of the model for took place between 1 September – 30 October 2023. The **outcomes of the consultation** were published in December 2023, and the findings will be used to inform the next steps.

COMMITMENT

A Good Childhood

Intandem Mentoring Programme

We continue to fund the Intandem mentoring programme £750,000 each year to provide mentoring support to children and young people with care experience.

STATUS

The eligibility for the Intandem Mentoring Programme has been extended to include children and young people in kinship care and those at risk of becoming subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order. The programme aims to reduce the need for crisis intervention by investing in 'preventative spend' on mentoring for children and young people.

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COMMITMENT

School Age Childcare (formerly Wraparound Support)

We will work with Local Government and other partners to develop the local infrastructure and services needed to deliver innovative School Age Childcare services in specific communities in six local authority areas through our Early Adopter Community work, as well as through our existing service level delivery models.

Alongside this work, we will start to design and prototype a digital childcare service which will reduce the access and financial barriers target families experience when navigating the childcare system. Additionally, we will expand our 'Extra Time' programme delivered in partnership with the Scottish Football Association, providing funded breakfast, after school and holiday clubs for target families across Scotland.

We will continue to engage and co-design with groups who are under-represented, to ensure a future system of school age childcare helps tackle child poverty, promotes family wellbeing, drives greater gender equality, and keeps The Promise to our children with care experience.

Time programme; 900 from our Access to Childcare fund projects (ACF), and over 600 from the EACs. These services are specifically targeted at the priority family types as set out in Best Start Bright Futures.

There is continued work across critical projects across multiple action areas including regulation, workforce qualifications, and maximising uptake of existing benefits which will improve the national infrastructure that supports the existing SACC sector and improve accessibility and affordability of SACC.

In October 2022, we asked four Early Adopter Communities across Scotland to provide school age childcare that is targeted to support families most at risk of poverty. These projects in communities in Clackmannanshire, Dundee, Glasgow and Inverclyde are all supported by existing tackling child poverty initiatives, combining provision of school age childcare with wider supports for families to maximise benefits.

The Scottish Government are supporting these projects to collaborate with community-led organisations on the ground. This is key to reaching the right families at the right time to understand the challenges families are facing at a local level. The Early Adopter Communities work has been specifically targeted at the six priority family types who are most at risk of living in poverty, with access to childcare to support families to take up or sustain employment or for carers to have a break from caring responsibilities, where that's needed. These projects are taking a place-based, and people-centred approach, building trusted relationships and strong partnerships. Local intelligence gathering and community engagement has identified other families who may benefit from subsidised or funded school age childcare, particularly the care experienced community. A key priority of the work is being able to access whole family supports, creating supports around children and families.

STATUS

School Age Childcare (SACC) is currently being delivered across 6 Early Adopter Communities (EACs), 8 Access to Childcare fund projects, and 31 football clubs (through the Scottish Football Association Extra Time Programme). Across all of our School Age Childcare Programme tests of change, we are currently supporting 4,200 children from low income families to access services, which includes 2,700 from our Extra

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Currently, the four first early adopter community projects are supporting around 20 families from the care experienced community to access fully funded school age childcare before and after school, and during the holidays.

We are beginning to see the impact of this work on these families with projects witnessing improved family relationships, stress reduction, and improved outcomes for children who have experienced high levels of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. There has also been reports that financial pressures have been relieved, allowing carers to do activities with the children under their care. Areas of focus across the Early Adopter Communities have been to alleviate pressure on families, giving carers time to promote their own health and wellbeing, attend appointments or spend time with other family members, while secure in the knowledge children have access to the specialist support needed to help them build trusted relationships with adults and children.

The children who have attended out of school childcare services are likely to have current or previous Social Work involvement and many have complex needs that can result in challenging behaviour in the childcare setting. This has resulted in extensive support and training, given to the childcare provider in order to support the families, children and staff, including trauma-informed training and increasing staff/child ratios, helping staff use de-escalation and trauma-informed practice.

Close working with carers and agencies has helped to understand triggers and provide ways for children to self-regulate. The changes implemented have meant that the children are much more settled with less instances of challenging behaviours and are provided with structure and consistency.

However, we know that we need to capture more learning, and gather more evidence from children and families, to further understand the impact and the potential of this work. This will be a focus of the monitoring and evaluation of the Early Adopter Communities as they continue to develop.

As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the Early Adopters Community project we have asked each local authority to report on the number of kinship and care experienced families that they are supporting. We have also asked for detail to better understand what impact they have are having on these families.

We will continue to support the EAC projects to gather stories from families and maximise learning to understand the dynamics and challenges families are facing. The knowledge and learning that we are capturing will help inform policy decisions at a national level to ensure we are supporting children and families with care experience as best we can.



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COMMITMENT

Community Learning and Development: Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland

We will take a holistic approach to learning through The Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland, to be published in May 2022. This strategy will help tackle the wider structural and social inequalities that impact families’ abilities to stay together and thrive. It will increase the availability of, access to, and support for family learning, encouraging families to learn together and helping adults learn how to support their children’s learning.

STATUS

The Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland was published in May 2022. The Minister for Higher and Further Education and Minister for Veterans announced on 5 December 2023 an Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision across Scotland, with the Adult Learning strategy in turn being paused. The review report was published on the 17 July 2024 and the recommendations are now being considered by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

The independent review report of CLD is expected to support the future shape and strategic orientation of CLD, including the future of the Adult Learning Strategy as work continues towards reforming Scotland’s education and skills system.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Attendance and Addressing Exclusion in Educational Settings

Our national guidance, **Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1**, is clear that exclusion should be the last resort and where exclusion is used, it should be a proportionate response where there is no appropriate alternative. The guidance places importance on preventative approaches, including good behavior management and behavior support. In working towards the commitment to reduce the exclusion of children and young people with care experience, we will maintain and further embed our approaches of promoting positive relationships and behavior.

STATUS

The Promise called for an end to the exclusion of children with care experience. Whilst this action will need to be carefully considered with partners, our position continues to be that exclusion should be a last resort.

In June 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills convened the first meeting of a Headteacher Taskforce which focused on school exclusions. The topic of school exclusions was also discussed by a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities, at the series of behaviour summits held between September and November last year. The final summit coincided with the publication of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) which provides a robust national picture in relation to behaviour in Scotland’s schools. The Cabinet Secretary made a statement to Parliament in November 2023 confirming that a multi-year plan is in development to tackle instances of challenging behaviour, working with local authorities, trade unions and others.

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We are working with the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS) to establish what actions are required to respond to the findings of the summit process and BISSR. It is intended that the plan will include actions relating to supporting attendance, and towards creating safe and consistent environments in schools, through improved guidance and support on relationship approaches, consequences, and exclusion. The national action plan was published in August.

COMMITMENT

Restraint (Education)

Consultation on draft guidance on the use of physical intervention in educational settings concluded in October 2022. The physical intervention working group is reconvening to consider amendments to the final guidance to allow it to be published as soon as possible.

STATUS

Following the conclusion of the consultation on the draft guidance on the use of physical intervention in educational settings in October 2022 the guidance is being revised, with a target date for publishing the final guidance of summer 2024, and a review taking place 12 months later. Alongside this, we are exploring opportunities to strengthen the legal framework governing this area which will include consideration of the robustness of recording procedures.

A review of effectiveness of guidance will be conducted in early summer 2025. Evaluation criteria for the review of the guidance will be developed by the physical intervention working group.

COMMITMENT

Education Scotland

We will create the conditions for change in our approach to education through raising awareness by:

- engagement to raise the profile and understanding of The Promise within education settings.
- provision of resources to support relationship based approaches across the educational workforce including through the National Improvement Hub and support for working with Realising the Ambition.

STATUS

The Scottish Government has been engaging with partners, including Education Scotland, COSLA, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Virtual School Head Teachers, and CELCIS to consider the calls for action made by The Promise in the context of education in order to develop these into meaningful, measurable outcomes. These outcomes will form part of a framework which aims to focus on improving the educational outcomes of children and young people with care experience. Educational outcomes include increased attendance and reduced exclusion, improved staying on, improving achievement and attainment, and sustaining positive destinations upon leaving school. The framework aims to build on actions already being taken across Scotland's education system to keep The Promise. The Promise in education framework and outcomes underpin wider work underway jointly between the Scottish Government, Local Government and The Promise Scotland to develop a national Promise Progress Framework.

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As part of this engagement, we have been keen to capture current and developing practice in a number of areas. Case studies will help articulate the breadth of work underway across educational authorities and share learning.

Education Scotland are working across the wider education system to identify the actions required for practitioners, settings and local authorities to implement The Promise, the **Additional Support for Learning Implementation Review**, and incorporation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, within the framework of Getting it right for every child.

We are undertaking a Programme of Awareness raising through the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Regional Improvement Collaborative Leadership Teams, the Family Learning Network, the Virtual Schools and Head Teachers Network, and local authority Head Teacher Development Days.

We have co-developed a **keeping The Promise Award Programme** for individual practitioners and educational establishments. This Professional Learning Programme has been designed at 3 levels: individuals (I Promise Badge), and Educational Establishments (We Promise Award) and keeping The Promise Award when settings can demonstrate that their actions and approaches are having a positive impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of children with care experience and their families (linked to above The Promise in Education Framework).

The Award Programme was formally launched in March 2024. The full Award requires Educational Establishments and local authorities to provide evidence of impact of any changes they have made that supports the educational experience and outcomes of learners with care experience. In 2024/25 we will begin to collate this evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, to provide 'Stories of Change'.

The keeping The Promise Award resources are now published on the Education Scotland website: <https://education.gov.scot/resources/keeping-the-promise-award-programme/>

Although intended for inclusion in local authorities and School Improvement Plans for 2024/25, two regions (Northern Alliance and SWEIC) and 6-7 local authorities have become early adopters of the Programme and are either providing professional learning for trainers or are delivering directly in educational establishments. Feedback from early adopters is very positive.

In collaboration with partners, we are developing a set of educational outcomes for children and young people with care experience. The outcomes will seek to improve the engagement, achievement, attendance and attainment of those with care experience and support their transition from education. This framework will be tested in a number of local authorities from spring 2024.

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COMMITMENT

Creating the Conditions for Change

Education Reform

The Scottish Government is taking forward sweeping reform, which will result in the creation of new qualifications and national education agencies and will deliver a world class education system that supports learners to thrive, providing them with the best opportunities to succeed.

Education reform will deliver real change and benefits for learners, teachers and the wider education workforce, and our economy and society.

The voices of learners and all those who support them will be at the heart of education reform.

The needs of young people with care experience will be considered as part of the significant programme of education reform.

STATUS

The Scottish Government are working to establish a new agency for Scottish education, a new independent inspectorate, and a new qualifications body.

Education reform also includes the reform of the approach to assessment and qualifications, and the overall delivery of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Implementation Framework, including re-assessing the vision for Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and improvements to curriculum delivery and measurement of impact.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills gave an update to Parliament in November 2023, and set out the priority of ensuring reform is right for our system and creates change in practice and culture. They also highlighted the importance of a holistic approach to reform across the Education and Skills system and the creation of a new Centre for Teaching Excellence.

We are making progress on reform work with a revised governance and delivery model now implemented for reform across the Education and Skills portfolio. We are taking the opportunity to get reform right while working with teachers, practitioners, and others involved in delivering education day in, day out across the full range of settings, listening to the voices and views of children, young people and all those experiencing education.

The next steps are:

- Transitional governance arrangements to be agreed for the new Qualifications Body the New Agency and New Inspectorate.
- The analysis of the consultation on the proposed Education Bill for New Qualifications Body and Independent Inspectorate was published in June 2024.
- Debate in parliament on Qualifications review, followed by Scottish Government's Response (expected spring 2024).
- Curriculum Improvement Cycle to commence.
- Co Design work for Centre for Teaching Excellence to commence (spring 2024)
- School Education Digital Strategy to be developed (late 2024).

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COMMITMENT

Removing Barriers

Education Scotland

Education Scotland are developing two resources to support relationship based approaches across the educational workforce. These resources are designed to support an informed level of practice and will be accessible to a wide range of practitioners.

Work has begun to share with other services, such as, Children's Hearings Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Police, and Community Learning and Development to promote shared values and language across all services supporting children and young people.

STATUS

Resources to support relationship based approaches across the educational workforce have been completed:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/promoting-positive-relationships-and-behaviour-in-educational-settings/>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/Restorative-approaches-to-support-positive-relationships-and-behaviour>

A suite of informed level professional learning modules in the area of Relationships and Behaviour have been included in the new Inclusion, Wellbeing and Equalities Professional learning Framework:

<https://education.gov.scot/resources/inclusion-wellbeing-equalities-professional-learning-framework/>

Modules include: Active Listening, Attunement, Co-regulation and De-escalation, Expectations and Consequences, Regulate-relate-reason-restore, Relational approaches, Relationships matter, Self-Regulation, The Brain and Emotional Regulation, and Window of Tolerance.

The next step is development of Modularised Skilled level resources to complement the informed level resources. These new resources are designed to be more accessible for practitioners and educational establishments providing them more flexibility in how they use the resources in their own context.

National Improvement Hub

Education Scotland, working in partnership, have developed a **National Improvement Hub** of resources to increase awareness for practitioners on how to support children and young people on the edges of care, in care and those at risk of being criminalised:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/summary-information-relating-to-corporate-parenting/>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/disclosure-what-educational-practitioners-should-know/>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/the-children-s-hearing-what-educational-practitioners-should-know/>

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/supporting-learners-who-offend-or-who-are-at-risk-of-offending/>

Education Scotland supports the **Childrens Hearings Improvement Partnership** and **Youth Justice Improvement Board** (CHIP and YJIB), **Kinship Collaborative** and subgroups looking at aspects of implementation of the Care and Justice Bill such as the age of criminal responsibility. As information becomes available the educational resources to support practitioners are updated.

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COMMITMENT

Removing Barriers:

Education Scotland Review of CECYP Fund

Education Scotland has supported Scottish Government in reviewing reports from local authorities on the use of the Care Experienced Children and Young People's (CECYP) Fund. From these reviews information about interventions and approaches used, measures and planned impact, and thinking about data mapping and collection has been fed back annually into the wider education system.

COMMITMENT

Place-based Social Justice

Scottish Mentoring & Leadership Programme

The Scottish Mentoring & Leadership programme will reach up to 15,000 care experienced and disadvantaged young people across 300 schools over the next five years. As a core offering, the programme will see the MCR Pathways mentoring programme rolled out to schools that want it. The programme is currently being rolled out across Scotland, initially targeting a number of priority local authority areas.

STATUS

Education Scotland Attainment Advisers, who support local authorities with **Scottish Attainment Challenge** Programmes, are updated annually on the **Care Experienced Children and Young People's Fund** in terms of good practice and challenges. Similar sessions have been held specifically for the **Virtual Schools Head Teachers (VSHT) Network**, and the **CELCIS Education Forum**.

A series of engagement events are underway through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives to explore and promote further ways to improve service integration and multi-agency working and the impact of this funding. So far one Regional Improvement Collaborative strategic level engagement event has focused specifically on how to improve data collection, collation, and sharing between social work and education and across local authority boundaries. Education Scotland Attainment Advisers now have a responsibility to report, through their tri-annual reports, on progress towards improving attainment of children and young people with care experience. Attainment Advisers also provide advice and support to local authorities in terms of interventions and practice to improve educational outcomes.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continue to support the **MCR Pathways** element of the programme. The programme is currently reaching 3,000 young people and young people with care experience on the edges of care. The first schools that onboarded are at the end of their funding cycle, which means it is for local authorities to consider the programme in the longer-term based on local circumstances. An evaluation is in place and the first substantial outputs are expected later in 2024.

This will support longer-term thinking around the programme. We will continue to support MCR Pathways in 2024/25 as it delivers for schools already on the programme and assess ongoing demand and the extent to which local authorities are sustaining the programme longer-term.

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COMMITMENT

Scottish Attainment Challenge

Scottish Attainment Challenge Actions including:

- Over the period to 2025/26 we will distribute around £11.5 million each year to local authorities to further support attainment.

STATUS

In 2022/23, £10.9m was provided to local authorities through the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund to help them improve the wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and young people with care experience aged 0-26.

In January 2024, the first tranche of funding for the 2023/24 academic term was paid to local authorities totalling £7m, enabling additional support to be provided to children and young people with care experience. The second tranche of payments covering the 2023/24 academic term will be paid in June bringing the total across the year to £10.5m.

Allocations for 2024/25 will be calculated following the publication of the Childrens Social Work Statistics Scotland: 2022 to 2023. They will be communicated to local authorities in the summer.

COMMITMENT

Virtual School Head Teachers

The implementation of a Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) role in 17 local authorities in Scotland has ensured a strong continued focus on meeting the particular needs of children and young people with care experience and this will be extended to a further two local authorities as of April 2022.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continues to provide £100,000 annual funding to enable CELCIS to support the continued facilitation of a Virtual School Head Teacher network. There are currently 18 Virtual Head Teachers (or equivalent) who are members of the network with a standing offer of support to other local authorities who are considering implementing the role. The network has also been expanded to include two Attainment Advisers from Education Scotland to offer additional support to the network and virtual head teachers.

Funding is provided to CELCIS to facilitate, support, and manage a network of Virtual Head Teachers. This includes undertaking research and evaluation around the development of the role in Scotland, and how it can help improve the lives and education outcomes of young people with care experience. Decisions around the introduction of the role remain with each individual local authority.

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COMMITMENT

Lifetime Skills and Apprenticeships

Supporting Access to Further & Higher Education

Skills Development Scotland offer enhanced contribution rates for Modern Apprentices up to the age of 29 for young people with care experience.

STATUS

Since 2015/16, published statistics show that In 2015/15, 0.9% of Modern Apprentices self-reported as having care experience, and this has increased to 2.3% in 2023/24. Skills Development Scotland continue to work with training providers and stakeholders to improve self-reporting and to simplify the eligibility criteria and process for claiming Enhanced Funding.

Uptake of the number of Modern Apprentices (MA) with care experience can be monitored through the official Modern Apprenticeship Statistics which are published quarterly by Skills Development Scotland. **Modern Apprenticeships statistics – Skills Development Scotland.**

COMMITMENT

FE and HE Student Financial Support

Supporting Access to Further & Higher Education

We are committed to an ambitious programme of reform to our student support package over this Parliamentary term. We have committed that the total student support package reaches the equivalent of the Living Wage over the next three years, including for estranged students; we will also introduce a special support payment so that students on benefits do not lose out because they are in receipt of, or entitled to, student support; and we will undertake a review of postgraduate funding and take measures to halt student loan interest during maternity leave.

STATUS

To support learning and address potential unfairness in the system, our people with care experience who meet the access threshold are now guaranteed offer of an undergraduate place at a Scottish university.

The **Care Experienced Bursary (CEB)** is a non-income assessed, non-repayable grant available to eligible Scottish domiciled students in full-time Further or Higher Education at college or university who have been in care by a local authority in the UK, before turning 18. It was introduced in the 2017/18 academic year and increased in 2023/24 academic year to £9,000. From 2022/23 academic year, a 12 monthly payment option was introduced to all eligible students in receipt of the higher education CEB. This is an opportunity for students to choose whether to receive their bursary payments over the current term time of nine months, or to spread

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these payments over the full year. The total bursary of £9,000 will remain the same. The 12 month option offers the added benefit for students to have their financial support spread evenly throughout the year to help them budget over the summer months.

From academic year 2024/25 we will be introducing a £2,400 increase to the main undergraduate student support package in the form of a **Special Support Loan**. This uplift will bring the support we offer students in line with the living wage. This also means that students with care experience, estranged students and those from the lowest household incomes can access funds up to £11,400. Introducing this uplift as a Special Support Loan will mean that those students who remain entitled to welfare benefits whilst they study can access this additional support without any further reduction in their benefit entitlement.

Students with care experience in Higher Education needing help with their accommodation costs during the summer period may be eligible to apply for the **Summer Accommodation Grant**.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) chair The Care-Experienced National Policy Group (CENPG). The group meets three times a year to ensure that SFC achieves its targets as set out in the **National Ambition for Care-Experienced Students**.

The CENPG's remit includes:

- Evaluating and driving progress on the National Ambition.
- Advising on interventions required to achieve the National Ambition.
- Advising on the current interventions in place to support the national ambition including the SFC Care-Experience Bursary.
- Making recommendations for 2023 onwards.
- Sharing information, updates and feedback both into and out of the Care- Experience Community of Practice.

Group membership includes representatives from stakeholder groups like Who Cares? Scotland, CELCIS and SAAS, Care-Experienced Regional Forum Leads, and college Care-Experienced practitioners.

COMMITMENT

Health and Wellbeing, Corporate Parenting

sportscotland

sportscotland continue to share good practice and learning through the national corporate parenting collaborative group. Engagement also continues with Who Cares? Scotland on a new collaborative network that they are leading to share ideas and good practice.

STATUS

The National Corporate Parenting Collaborative Group met for the first time in January 2023. sportscotland worked with Who Cares? Scotland to deliver an introduction to corporate parenting session to the Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBS). Although SGBS are not corporate parents, the aim was to further their understanding of the needs of young people with care experience in sport and actions that they can take to reduce barriers. The session had attendees from 11 different sports organisations. sportscotland continue to engage with the Who Cares? Scotland Group on a quarterly basis. In March 2023, they

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presented the progress made on their journey as a Corporate Parent. This included updates on the support to young people with care experience and the development of their new Corporate Parenting plan, which they consulted with young people with care experience on. sportscotland published their 2024-27 Corporate Parenting Plan in March 2024.

In July 2024, the SFA held a consultation event to seek the views of young people with Care Experience on their participation in Football, offering tickets to a Scottish National Women's Team game to those who attended. sportscotland provided support to the SFA, connecting them with young people to attend the event.

In July 2024, the sportscotland communications theme was 'Care experience in sport #TimeToCare'. During the month they worked with a young person with care experience to share their journey in the sporting system. The article can be found here: Care experience and sport: Kira Henry – Sport First (sportscotland.org.uk)

sportscotland also hosted an episode of their Young People's Sport (YPSP) Panel Podcast profiling care experience in sport. Hosts from the YPSP were joined by Kira, a former YPSP member, and Callum from Who Cares? Scotland to help to shine a light on this topic and shared some tips for anyone involved in sport to play their part in making sport more inclusive for people with care experience.

sportscotland will continue to engage with the Who Cares? Scotland National Corporate Parenting Collaborative Group to share learning, ideas and best practice with other Corporate Parents. They also plan to work with Who Cares? Scotland to develop further training opportunities for internal staff and external partners in the sporting system on the needs and barriers of young people with care experience.

Who Cares? Scotland profiled sportscotland in their Promising Practice Newsletter in October 2023. The newsletter highlighted examples of good practice and learning. This included progress around research in care experience in sport and a local example of the support provided to young people with care experience in North Ayrshire through sportscotland's Active Schools Programme. The newsletter can be found here: **Newsletter and Promising Practice Summer/Autumn 2023.**

They also worked with Who Cares? Scotland to deliver an introduction to Corporate Parenting session to Active Schools co-ordinators and managers in November 2023. Over 120 individuals attended this online session. sportscotland met with the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and Who Cares? Scotland to discuss the barriers to participation, and how the SFA could develop their own support for young people with care experience in football.

Sportscotland will continue to engage with the Who Cares? Scotland National Corporate Parenting Collaborative Group to share learning, ideas and best practice with other Corporate Parents. They also plan to work with Who Cares? Scotland to develop further training opportunities for internal staff and external partners in the sporting system on the needs and barriers of young people with care experience.

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COMMITMENT

Fair Employment: Labour Market Strategy

We will promote payment of the real Living Wage Rate to all employees aged 18 and above. This measure will target support to low income groups like our young people with care experience.

We are committed to commencing work to develop a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland. We have established a Steering Group to explore how this can be delivered within existing powers. Comprised of an independent expert group and a cross party strategy group this work will look at how a Minimum Income Guarantee should work for different priority households, including people with care experience and families. The Expert Group published an interim report 2023 and is due to present its final report to The Scottish Government in 2024.

STATUS

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy has committed by 2025 to: increasing the number of people earning at least the real living wage, and working in jobs that meet fair work principles, contributing to society through fulfilling and increasingly productive work, with a narrower gender pay gap.

Work is ongoing to support the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group make its recommendations and publish its final report in 2024. The Group are considering a draft position for care leavers which will be developed with organisations representing those with care experience.

COMMITMENT

Access & Support in Employment

No One Left Behind

We will significantly increase investment in our No One Left Behind approach to support parents to access and progress in work through a new offer for parents experiencing poverty which brings together a range of services and support including employability, childcare, health, transport and family wellbeing, with the aim of reducing poverty by increasing household income through employment. The menu of support would be the same for every parent, but applied based on the need and circumstances of the individual parent/family.

We will also work to ensure that employability and skills support is matched with fair work opportunities, and will work in partnership with public, private and third sector employers to identify and overcome barriers to parental employment. This includes progressing fair work actions in low paid sectors.

STATUS

The Scottish Government made available up to £90m for devolved employability services in 2024/25, enabling investment in front line services to be protected at 2023/24 levels. Work is ongoing to develop an strategic plan, with a view to publishing in autumn 2024.

We are working with employers and trade unions in sectors where low pay and precarious work can be most prevalent to promote sectoral fair work agreements, concordats and charters, and collective bargaining to achieve higher standards of pay, better security of work, and greater union

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representation. Existing commitments to sectoral agreements are being pursued in several sectors including Social Care and National Care Service, Construction including responding to the Fair Work Convention's inquiry recommendations and an Industry Leadership Group (ILG), will drive and support delivery of the actions set out in the Retail Strategy, in particular on improving fair work across the sector.

While the legal powers governing flexible working are reserved to the UK Government, we remain committed to improving access to flexible working for all sectors of the economy. This supports people, including those managing care commitments, to enter or remain in paid work and enables businesses to recruit and retain talent, skills and experience.

Employability is a key pillar in Best Start, Bright Futures, with commitments made over the lifetime of the plan to ensure that our services support parents into work as an effective and sustainable route out of poverty for families. In recognition that income from employment is a key driver for reducing poverty, Best Starts, Bright Futures sets out ambitious commitments to build on current employability interventions to enhance the reach and effectiveness of our services for parents.

The commitment to support parents to increase income is also detailed in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, as part of the wider commitment to eradicate structural barriers to participation in the labour market.

In 2023/24 we provided £67,575 in funding to flexible working experts, Flexibility Works, to promote and support employers across Scotland to adopt flexible workplaces. This activity has primarily focused on awareness raising via webinars and talks to employers; work on the change agent network and the production of a Flex for Life report.

Assessment is currently being made of a different

option for provision of up to £100k to support flexible working during 2024/25. This will in turn support a number of key priorities across government such as economic inactivity, labour shortages, reducing poverty (including child poverty), gender pay gap, disability employment and more.

Health and Work

Health and employment have a bidirectional relationship, with good health supporting high levels of employment, and good quality jobs contributing to supporting good population health. In recent years economic inactivity due to ill health has been increasing in Scotland, with ill health the largest single reason given for people being economically inactive. It is clear that supporting people to sustain, or to re-enter employment, who have ill health contributes to improving population health, diversifying the labour market and income maximisation.

Joint leadership of work to address this across DG Health and Social Care and DG Economy has been underway, with a programme of activity including a number of short-term actions under way that aim to improve effects and outcomes of current health-related services and programmes that provide support to employers and employees or people seeking employment including:

- creating a single point of access for employers, workers and other users to access advice and support relating to physical and mental health and work;
- supporting changes to Working Health Services Scotland to; improve access and reach through increased awareness via the Healthy Working Lives branding, adjusting its remit to encourage individuals to link their employer to the available advice and support and promote an employer offer through Healthy Working Lives;
- support NHS Boards, local authorities and

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other public agencies taking purposeful action through the NHS Anchors Workforce Strategic Group.

Advice and recommendations on potential deliverables for the 2024/2025 financial year, as well as the longer term strategic plan for health and economic inactivity were provided to Ministers on 1 July 2024.

The advice was the culmination of work between Population Health Strategy and Improvement Division and Labour Market Strategy to identify the next phase of activity to mitigate the trend in increasing levels of economic inactivity due to ill health. That work initially came out of the previous Public Services and Economy Ministerial Group in 2023-24 that commissioned all portfolios to identify contributions to reducing economic inactivity.

The health contribution suggested for the economic inactivity plan contained five actions focused on near term deliverables to refine the existing framework of services and the evidence base. This 5-part action plan for 2023/24 has been completed for the most part, and has supported developing capacity to deliver the medium-term plan recommended to Ministers for 2024/25.

COMMITMENT

Access & Support in Employment:

Fair Start Scotland

We are investing almost £24 million in 2022/23 in Fair Start Scotland (FSS), our first iteration of devolved employability provision. The person-centred approach to all Scottish Government funded employability delivery including Fair Start Scotland ensures people are treated with dignity and respect by providing flexible support, taking into account personal circumstances and removing barriers to accessing work.

STATUS

The Fair Start Scotland (FSS) programme was backed by £23.5m funding from the overall £82.9m employability budget for 2022/23. We will invest £21.5m in its final year (2023/24) to provide support to those at risk of long-term unemployment and to disabled people. Although new referrals ended in March 2024 £90m will be assigned for devolved employability services in 2024/25, ensuring participants who remain on the live caseload continue to receive the full FSS service until they exit or start work. Of this we will invest £13.3m in FSS.



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COMMITMENT

Access & Support in Employment:

Young Person's Guarantee

The Young Person's Guarantee aims to connect every 16 to 24 year old to the opportunity of a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training programme or volunteering placement.

STATUS

Young Persons Guarantee: between November 2020 and March 2023, we provided more than £175 million, with the aim of supporting new and enhanced opportunities for young people. Over 830 employers have signed up to the Young Persons Guarantee, offering over 22,000 opportunities, many of which focus on care experienced young people.

The Young Person's Guarantee ceased being a live policy from April 2023 when the UK Government funding stopped. Activity has been mainstreamed and continues to support young care experienced young people through No One Left Behind and our Third Sector programmes into positive post school destinations. This activity is now funded through the core skills budget.

The **Developing the Young Workforce** programme enhances provision for care experienced young people in schools. This includes via School Coordinators supporting every mainstream secondary school in Scotland and via our partnership with MCR Pathways and Career Ready, to provide mentors for young people across Scotland.

Many Local Employability Partnerships are prioritising supported employment, education and training programmes for care experienced young people, which includes strengthening the voice of care leavers in local service design. Employer Recruitment Incentives are available to support those furthest away from the labour market, including those who have been in the care system.

The **Discovering Your Potential** employability programme provides flexible and intensive support for care leavers, who face multiple barriers to accessing positive destinations.

Additional funding is provided to Inspiring Scotland to deliver **Our Future Now**, an employability programme aimed at vulnerable young people who are facing significant barriers, including those with care experience.

COMMITMENT

Access & Support in Employment

Community Learning and Development

We are developing a **Scottish Youth Work Strategy**, where youth work outcomes are based on a foundation of trust, respect and values that puts each young person at the centre of their learning journey. The Youth Work Strategy is due to be published in spring 2023.

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STATUS

The Minister for Higher and Further Education and Minister for Veterans announced an independent review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision across Scotland in December 2023 with the development of the Youth Work Strategy in turn being paused for the duration of the review. The review report was published on the 17 July 2024 and the recommendations are now being considered by the Scottish Government and CoSLA.

The independent review report of CLD is expected to support the future shape and strategic orientation of CLD, including the future of the Youth Work Strategy as work continues towards reforming Scotland’s education and skills system.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Those Not in Work

Benefit Take-up Strategy

We are committed to increasing benefit take-up by ensuring people are aware of, and enabled to access, the financial support that they are eligible for and entitled to. People with care experience are identified within our second **Benefit Take-up Strategy**, published in October 2021, as one of our Seldom Heard groups. We are currently expanding the membership of our Stakeholder Take-up Reference Group and going forward, we will engage with Who Cares? Scotland to make sure the voices of our Care Experienced population are represented in all future policy work.

STATUS

The second Benefit Take-Up Strategy was published in October 2021. Whilst the next Strategy is not due until October 2026, we have committed to a new annual publication which provides updated estimates of take-up for relevant benefits, as well as setting out policy progress and next steps. The most recent iteration of this document was published in **November 2023**.

We have commissioned independent research, undertaken by the Scottish Centre for Social Research, to review and refine our understanding of key seldom-heard population groups, including care experience, in light of the socio-economic impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, as well as significant developments within the Scottish social security system. This independent evidence review will be published in spring 2024, however, early findings suggest that people with care experience remain a seldom-heard group across the Scottish social security system. Findings from this research will be used to provide an analytical basis to inform future policy development to support seldom-heard groups, including people with care experience, to access their social security entitlements.

Furthermore, Social Security Scotland’s External Communications Team will be undertaking market research, based on the evidence review findings, to understand how to effectively market devolved payments to the identified groups. This work is anticipated to conclude by summer 2024 and will be used to support Social Security Scotland to design marketing materials and implement additional support to address the challenges particular groups face in accessing their entitlements.

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COMMITMENT

Human Rights Strategy and Legislation

Human Rights Bill

A new **Human Rights Bill** will be introduced to Parliament during this parliamentary year. This Bill, which follows on from the work of the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership report, proposes to incorporate four UN human rights treaties into Scots law, within the limits of devolved competence.

As part of our lived experience work, we have worked with partners to ensure children and young people and the voices of our people with care experience are heard. Further information on the Lived Experience Board work can be found [here](#).

We consulted on proposals for the Bill between June and October 2023 and received almost 400 responses from a wide range of stakeholders and published an **independent analysis** of responses in January 2024 alongside an Easy Read version. Responses included submissions from children and young people using child-friendly consultation materials. Working with the organisation Together we are developing a child-friendly version of the independent analysis of consultation responses. There was a strong call from respondents for the equality provision in the Bill (which aims to promote equal access to Bill rights) to explicitly include care experience.

COMMITMENT

Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights

We will consult on a draft strategy for consultation to better mainstream equality, inclusion and human rights across Government and the wider public sector, which will look at how we improve leadership and accountability, build greater policy coherence, strengthen capability and skills, and improve how we centre evidence and lived experience in policy making.

The initial consultation and engagement exercise for the Mainstreaming Strategy was completed at the end of 2022. A draft strategy (together with a supporting action plan and toolkit to support achievement of mainstreaming equality and human rights operationally across Scottish Government and the wider public sector) is in preparation, using the feedback from the initial engagement exercise. A strategy and supporting action plan and toolkit have been drafted using the feedback from the initial engagement exercise. Further engagement with stakeholders, including a written consultation exercise, will commence in 2024, with publication of the strategy planned for 2025.

Next steps: Work will continue to seek to strengthen implementation of human rights, including further development and engagement on ambitious proposals for a new Human Rights Bill.

Mainstreaming Strategy next steps: further engagement with stakeholders (including written consultation exercise) later in 2024; analysis of responses and subsequent drafting amendments over the autumn/winter; publication of the strategy in 2025.

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COMMITMENT

Social Justice and Health

Place-based Activity

We are committed, with COSLA, to delivering the Place Principle. This is a 5 year programme to accelerate our policy ambitions through 20 minute neighbourhoods, community-led regeneration and town centre revitalisation.

The scaffolding to deliver this includes:

- a Place Based Investment Programme designed to take a whole system approach to the use of resources for shared outcome;
- the Place Framework which sets out common questions to consider when determining local change; and
- the setting up of a Place Action Group which is addressing coordination across portfolios and localities.

STATUS

Work to deliver the **Place Based Investment Programme (PIPB)** is ongoing. This includes allocated funding directly to all 32 local authorities, the **Regeneration Capital Grant Fund** which is a competitive fund, funding for **Clyde Gateway**, and in 2022-23, funding for demonstrator projects and community-led regeneration capital projects. The **Place Action Group** has been set up, resulting in a short-term programme of action which is now being progressed with partners. Since 2021, over

£225m capital investment has been delivered, which has aligned with other place-based funding initiatives and helps to tackle inequalities and support delivery of a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy in disadvantaged communities across Scotland. This includes funding of £94m to date, delivered directly to local authorities to allocate and support shared local place plans.

In December 2021, we launched consultations on **Open Space Strategies, Play Sufficiency Assessments** and **Local Development Plan Regulations** which will benefit physical and cognitive development, and uphold children’s right to engage in play and recreational activities as well as ensuring access to greenspace to ensure the best possible play experience.

National Planning Framework (NPF4) was adopted in February 2023. The Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations 2023 and the Development Plan Regulations were enacted in May 2023. Planning guidance to support the Development Plan Regulations and Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations was published in May and Dec 2023 respectively. The **Place Standard** tool **Children’s Version** and **Young People’s Versions** were launched in 2022.

Work continues with Place Standard partners in promoting wider use of the tools as part of place-based working and enabling positive engagement with children and young people, including in support of NPF4. It is anticipated the Open Space Strategies Regulations will be brought forward during 2024/25.

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COMMITMENT

Place-based Activity

Social Innovation Partnership (SIP)

We will scale the Social Innovation Partnership to promote and embed wellbeing and capability approaches across different service settings to create most holistic and person-centred practice.

We will publish the initial findings from our learning partner (I-Sphere) by June 2022. Going forward we will scale the SIP's wellbeing and capabilities approach at two key levels:

- Firstly, by continuing to work with social entrepreneurs to test, scale and bring together innovative and person-centred approaches that support flourishing lives.
- Secondly, by working to remove systemic barriers that get in the way of delivering person-centred and relational approaches.

The SIP already supports a small number of local authority partnership (Tayside Collaborative and the Clackmannanshire Family Wellbeing Partnership) to help facilitate this. We plan to establish a further three such partnerships over the next four years.

By using a place-based approach, working locally with all partners to identify and overcome barriers to delivering effective child poverty interventions, we will enable our partners across the public, private and third sector to align services to make them work for people who need it most.

STATUS

Work of the Social Innovation Partnership (SIP) is ongoing. Delivery partners continue to provide vital support to families across the country, reaching up to 3,000 people each year through a range of supports, including care experienced young people.

We continue to make progress with our Clackmannanshire Family Wellbeing Partnership (FWP), which the local authority is articulating as a coherent overall vision for how it designs and delivers services so that they are more person-centred and enabling. We are seeing greater integration of local services which is supporting improved outcomes for families, including children and young people. Work is underway to enhance employability, further deepen service integration, develop local partnerships with the third sector, and to create holistic support pathways for children, young people and their families through school hubs.

Pathfinder work in Dundee and Glasgow is ongoing with discussions locally about the scale and spread. Consideration also being given to more pathfinder locations. The Dundee pathfinder is progressing well, with increased engagement with families which has led to positive outcomes for including employment, further education, and financial gains. The Glasgow pathfinder is also progressing well, with expansion plans in place and more than 100 partner organisations now signed up to the pathfinder.

Pathfinder work in Dundee and Glasgow is progressing well, with discussions locally about the scale and spread. The Pathfinders have adopted a no wrong door approach to provide wrap-around, whole family support. By engaging with families before they reach crisis point and providing holistic support, the Pathfinders are working in a preventative space with the aim of

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improving services for families and improving the lives of children in Scotland. The Pathfinders do not specifically target care experienced young people but support a range of families and individuals, including the 6 priority family groups, some of whom have had contact with the care system.

Work is also ongoing to draw together key points of learning and characteristics for place-based approaches to tackle deep poverty, based on the partnership work in Dundee, as well as projects in Clackmannanshire and Glasgow.

All of this work is underpinned by a learning network which is open to all local authorities and includes annual national learning events and a set of delivery-focussed Communities of Practice supported by the Scottish Poverty Information and Research Unit. Formal evaluation of the Dundee and Glasgow pathfinders is underway, similarly for the Clacks Family Wellbeing Partnership, due to report in early 2025. The ongoing learning and evaluation of this work is informing plans to expand the number of partnerships over the course of 2024/25.

- Identify and explore new partnerships with more local authorities as part of the expansion of this programme (Jan-March)
- The Child Poverty Pathfinders are undergoing a formal evaluation which will consider impact of the work on a range of family types. Interim findings will be published March 2025. The evaluation will also provide ongoing learning and partners will utilise local data to adapt delivery to better support families in poverty.

COMMITMENT

Place and Wellbeing Programme

Our Place & Wellbeing Programme: We are focusing on two key areas where we believe there is already momentum for change:

- **Anchors:** we will support our health and social care providers, with an initial focus on NHS Boards to be effective ‘anchor institutions’ to prevent some causes of health inequalities by building wealth in their communities.
- **Communities:** we will cultivate community-led health improvement activity and look to embed this into local public services.

STATUS

Key updates include:

Anchors: We are committed to supporting the local delivery of Anchor Strategic Plans and strengthening NHS Scotland’s contribution to The Promise as Scotland’s largest corporate parent. All NHS Boards have submitted Anchor Strategic Plans and baselines of their Anchor activity, which include reference to any priority groups that are currently being targeted through Boards’ employability programmes and outline how fair work opportunities will target particular groups including care experienced. Through the Anchors Workforce Strategic Group we are working alongside the NHS and key partners, to improve the collaboration between Local Employability Partnerships and Health Boards, reduce barriers to widening access, and drive the development of earn as you learn access and progression opportunities.

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In April 2024, an updated equality and diversity monitoring form was implemented for NHS Scotland recruitment and workforce. For the first time we are gathering data on whether someone has ever been in care, their socioeconomic background, and caring responsibilities. This evidence will be used to inform and evaluate purposeful action to widen access and tackle inequity.

We have undertaken a review of the baseline data submitted by NHS Boards in March 2024 on their Anchor activity, including which priority groups (including child poverty priority groups and those with care experience) they are targeting as part of their employability strategies, as well as meeting with NHS territorial Boards in May to discuss their Anchor Strategic Plans, including their employability strategies.

Communities: We will be undertaking further engagement with Community Health Exchange member organisations and their public sector partners in order to look at tangible actions which would increase the capacity and influence of community organisations in tackling health inequalities.

Key next steps include:

Anchors: A review of the anchor metrics is currently underway, to ensure that we are gathering the most useful data to measure change.

Communities: By the end of 2024, we will develop specific recommendations on how we can increase the influence and capability of local community organisations in the decision.

COMMITMENT

Health & Wellbeing: Active Scotland

We want Scotland's young people with care experience, to feel welcome and involved in sport and we are working to ensure sportscotland and the sports sector have a better understanding of the needs of our young people with care experience. This includes improved access to sports coaching, sports leadership opportunities and improved access to career and development with sportscotland.

STATUS

sportscotland's commitment to inclusion means we want to support Scotland's young people with care experience to feel welcome and involved in sport. As inclusion underpins everything it does, sportscotland will continue to provide leadership to the sporting sector, to influence and drive the changes needed to address inequalities and ensure everyone can take part.

A new coaching qualification and subsidy approach has been implemented. The cost of and access to a course can often be seen as a barrier to coaches participating in learning and development. This subsidy approach is aimed at ensuring that our funding is targeted where it is needed most, with young people with care experience specified as a priority group.

sportscotland consulted with young people with care experience in the development of its new Corporate Parenting Plan. This included engagement with young people with care experience in North Ayrshire and Stirling. sportscotland listened to their views on the sporting system, what barriers they face, and what support they would need to participate in sport more.

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They continue to provide support to Young People's Sport Panel applicants and members selected to be on the panel. This includes making travel arrangements, prepaying travel expenses and ensuring panel commitments are not impacting other aspects of the members' lives. This support helps remove some of the challenges that young people with care experience and other underrepresented groups face.

In 2023, sportscotland worked with the Robertson Trust to facilitate an internship opportunity to a young person with care experience within its Sports Development team. sportscotland also engaged with Who Cares? Scotland on best practice for recruitment and ongoing support to care experienced young people. This may, for example, include advertising future vacancies through the Who Cares? Scotland network to ensure young people with care experience are aware of the opportunities and support available.

sportscotland also launched an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) **online toolbox**. The toolbox aims to help people working in the sporting sector to learn the basics about EDI in sport. This includes evidence on young people's with care experience participation in sport as well as the sporting professional workforce understanding of care experience.

sportscotland continues to work with local authority partners to support young people with care experience in sport. With support from the Active Schools team, over 200 young people with care experienced from North Ayrshire have been supported to attend inclusive residential opportunities at sportscotland's National Sport Centre in Inverclyde. Through targeted work in West Lothian, sportscotland are supporting three clubs to offer activities to young people with care experience. The clubs will offer opportunities for participation, with further support provided to the young people through the invested Active Schools Coordinator post.

COMMITMENT

Building Safer Communities

Violence Reduction Policy

Publication of the first ever national Violence Prevention Framework is expected in spring 2023.

The Framework will consider all the available evidence and identify policy priorities for all partners to work to, as we seek to prevent violence and make Scotland's communities safer. Including that our people with care experience are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and highlighting the work to tackle the links between Adverse Childhood Experiences and future victimisation or offending behaviour.

STATUS

The Violence Prevention Framework was published in May 2023 with a launch at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow where the Minister for Victims and Community Safety met Medics Against Violence Hospital Navigators.

Scottish Government and violence reduction partners have been working towards achieving the 15 actions contained within the Framework including developing a measurement framework. The Framework sets the strategic direction going forward, and is supported by an evidence supplement with implementation of the Framework's Action Plan agreed through annual stakeholder business plans for 2023/2024. Implementation of the Framework includes activity to identify opportunities to intervene earlier to reduce and prevent harm by those who have been, or are at risk of being, care experienced.

We will shortly be publishing a progress report covering the first year of the Framework's implementation (2023/24) highlighting the progress towards the Framework actions so far and some of the activity being undertaken with funded partner organisations in the coming year.

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COMMITMENT

Building Safer Communities

Cashback For Communities

We have adjusted the scope of the evaluation for Phase 5 to include analysis of the effectiveness in delivering support for care experienced children, children on the edge of care and their families. The evaluation will be undertaken after Phase 5 concludes in March 2023.

STATUS

Cashback for Communities – Phase 5 (2020-23)

The **Phase 5 Evaluation** was published in December 2023. The evaluation included evidence of staff training on trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); provision of trauma counselling; collaborative working with care related agencies and services; and the Cyrenians “Keeping Families Together” project that works in partnership with young people, their families and Scotland’s five secure units.

The Cashback team is engaging with key stakeholders to discuss the findings of the report, consider impact on shared policy areas, and potential for further work on shared policy aims.

Cashback for Communities – Phase 6 (2023-26)

CashBack for Communities supports the Scottish Government’s Vision For Justice, helping to build a just, safe and resilient Scotland. The fund focuses on young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system and the communities most affected by crime.

Phase 6 of Cashback launched on the 1st April 2023. During Phase 6 of CashBack for Communities, 29 projects are to receive up to a

total of £20 million of funding. Phase 6 will deliver a range of trauma-informed and person-centred services and activities for young people between the ages of 10-25 that:

- Support young people most at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour offending or reoffending towards or into positive destinations
- Provide person-centred support for young people, parents and families impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma
- Support young people to improve their health, mental health and wellbeing
- Support people, families and communities most affected by crime

Best Start – Bright Future links with Cashback

In September 2023 the Cashback team hosted a roundtable event between the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs and Cashback partners to discuss child poverty and the Best Start, Bright Futures programme.

Evidencing Impact

Each organisation funded through the Cashback for Communities programme collects data and evidence against the programme outcomes. An annual impact report is published and a full independent evaluation completed at the end of each three year programme phase.

There is overlap between the objectives of The Promise and the Cashback for Communities programme. However, specific data is not routinely captured on the number of young people with care experience or the outcomes for this group.

The most recent published reports are:

- **Phase 5 year three Impact Report (2023-24)** – Published November 2023

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■ Phase 5 full evaluation – Published December 2023

Further information on the **evaluation framework for Phase 6** can be found on the Cashback website.

The next report due to be published will be the year 1 Impact Report for Phase 6. This will be published autumn 2024.

Case study – Whole Family Support

Cashback for Communities Phase 5, Whole Family Support – Cyrenians

Cyrenians provided whole family support for young people leaving secure care, an approach which is well aligned to The Promise. It worked across secure care centres, with young people and families. It also provided support to families to help them prepare for and attend meetings about their child, as well as spending time with siblings to ensure their voices were heard before the young person moved back home.

Cyrenians worked alongside Scotland's five secure units, supporting young people and families to rebuild their relationships with the aim of enabling young people to return to the family home – where possible. It offered mediation between young people and their care givers, siblings or other relevant family members; outreach support breaking down barriers to education, wellbeing, employment and training; and group workshops to build resilience, conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation.

Through mediation, families were supported to negotiate rules and guidelines, set boundaries, communicate and move on from specific issues. Family outreach workers supported young people and the wider family, listening, building trusted relationships and helping young people develop their confidence and skills.

COMMITMENT

Tackling Violence Against Women & Girls

Working with COSLA we will publish a new 2 year Equally Safe Delivery Plan by the end of June 2022 that will run until autumn 2023. This plan will build on the many achievements of its predecessor, consolidate existing priorities and commitments, and consider what needs to be achieved for the Violence Against Women and Girls sector to fully recover from the pandemic. Longer term, we will be conducting a wider refresh of Equally Safe for commencement in autumn 2023.

STATUS

The **Delivery Plan** was published in June 2022 and the **strategy** was refreshed in December 2023. Work is now underway to develop a new delivery plan in partnership with COSLA.

We are also maintaining our **Delivering Equally Safe Fund**, which is providing support to a number of organisations working with children and young people affected by gender-based violence. Over the 2 year life-span of the fund, we are providing over £3.4 million to 12 organisations solely working with children and young people. We are providing a further £15 million to groups providing support to women and children.

Delivering Equally Safe funding will run until March 2025, which is an extension to the original timelines to enable stability to services whilst an independent review of funding is undertaken. We have established a **Sustainable Funding Project Board**, to consider the key recommendations of the **Independent Review of Violence Against Women and Girls**, funding, and procurement, which published its report in June 2023. The

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Project Board met for the first time in March 2024 to agree its terms of reference and key priorities for its initial 12 month workplan.

Progress is monitored by the Joint Strategic Board, the COSLA leadership board and the Equally Safe Ministerial Group. The new Equally Safe Delivery Plan is due to be published in late spring 2024.

COMMITMENT

Community Safety

Missing People

We will continue to reduce the number of care experienced young people who go missing through implementation of our Missing Persons Framework and our link up across Justice partners, health services and Missing People UK.

STATUS

The Scottish Government are funding two National Coordinators to develop local multi-agency partnerships across Scotland and provide Return Discussion training for individuals and organisations to limit the likelihood of people going missing repeatedly.

We will provide £145,000 to Missing People charity (2024-25) to ensure the two National Coordinators can continue to take forward and embed the Framework Implementation plan. They will work with partners in local authority areas to map current procedures, identify and build on good practice, develop multi-agency practice and protocols and provide training where required. We aim to reach engagement with all 32 local authority areas by April 2025.

The National Co-ordinators are working closely with Police Scotland to promote the implementation of the 'Not at Home' protocol following the launch in 2021. All local authority areas have indicated usage of the protocol but work continues to embed the protocol in everyday practice and build confidence of care staff to assess risk of care experienced young people who may be missing. Police Scotland missing person operational coordinators continue spend time with partners in the care sector to provide training, build relationships and ensure the protocol is being used appropriately.

The number of missing person investigations for care experienced young people has reduced from 4,255 in 2022-23 to 4,085 in 2023-24 and this has included a drop in high risk missing young people from 123 in 2022-23 to 87 in 2023-24. It is important that we support young people most at risk and the 'Not at Home' protocol can help to do that where appropriate. We continue to see local areas of good practice such as South Ayrshire where there has been a 40% reduction in missing persons episodes in 2023-24 from 41 in 2022-23 for care experienced young people.

Police Scotland have also been working to build usage of the Philomena protocol, a standardised form that carers use to collate relevant information in relation to and with each individual young person who has or may go missing. Key information being available can assist police in the event of a missing episode and cut down on the time a person is missing before they are located, particularly for those who have been missing previously. The protocol was piloted in three local authority areas and launched across Scotland in May 2023. Awareness of the protocol form will continue to be raised by National Coordinators and Police Scotland to partners to improve use by carers.

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We are continuing to engage with third sector partners such as Barnardo’s Scotland and Missing People charity to explore their experience of delivery, increase understanding of the return journey and build best practice to deliver more meaningful return home discussions after a missing episode. Our ambition is to establish multi agency partnerships for missing people in every local area in Scotland by 2025 that can focus on the specific missing issues in their locality.

The Missing Persons Framework supports the Scottish Government's Vision for Justice to have a society where people feel safe, and are, safer in their communities. Missing persons investigations have increased in the last two years following reductions during Covid-19 lockdowns but remain lower than pre-Covid figures. We will continue to work closely with Police Scotland to monitor and analyse the data from missing persons investigations across Scotland. This will allow us to build a picture of need and target the work of the National Coordinators, inform next steps in the development of missing policy and practice to help reduce repeat missing episodes and limit the harm people who are vulnerable may be exposed to.

COMMITMENT

Place and Wellbeing

Link Up are seeking to implement a new model of support for vulnerable families (many care experienced or at risk) in the Gallatown, Kirkcaldy. Their aim is to embed a new worker in the Link Up team to serve as a bridge to connect vulnerable families already involved in Link Up activities with the specialist assistance offered through the local Health Visitor, Community Social Work and Criminal Justice Teams.

STATUS

Link Up was co-funded in 2023-24 by Population Health and Community-led Regeneration teams. Alongside the impact the three Link Up projects have in each place (Muirhouse, Gallatown and Saltcoats), the overall aim of this funding is to contribute to our understanding of what is needed to create an environment for positive change in local areas using place-based approaches. A final report and case studies are due to be published in May 2024.

COMMITMENT

Community Justice

Custody

We will shift the balance to ensure the role of custody will be reserved only when no alternative is appropriate and begin a debate on who and what prison is for, including how to better accommodate individuals in the system from a trauma-informed perspective. A loss of liberty through custody should only be used as a last resort especially for young people and only where there is clear justification, for example, a risk of serious harm.

STATUS

In 2024-25, a total of £148 million will be invested in community justice. This includes an additional £14 million to encourage wider use of community-based interventions where appropriate.

This additional investment reflects the evidence that such interventions, including Community Payback Orders, can be more effective than

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short-term imprisonment at reducing reoffending, assisting with rehabilitation and ultimately ensuring there are fewer victims of crime.

Legislation

The Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 refocuses how remand is used so that it is reserved for those who pose a risk to victim/public safety. It also intends to improve support for people leaving prison. While the Act does not have a specific focus on reducing the use of custody for young people, we do know that there are an estimated 27,000 children affected by parental imprisonment which is a recognised ACE. Refocusing how imprisonment is used, and improving support for people leaving custody can also support their children and families.

Transformational change

A Transformational Change Programme (TCP) has been established with the aim of promoting a shift in how we address offending and reoffending, through reduced use of custody and greater use of justice in the community. This TCP, “Shifting the balance between custody and justice in the community”, will support the implementation of the revised National Strategy for Community Justice and its accompanying Delivery Plan, published in June 2023.

Review of sentencing and penal policy

In February 2024, the Scottish Government announced its intention to establish an independent review of sentencing and penal policy. This will examine how and when custodial sentences and community interventions are used, how effective these are and what more can be done to prevent crime and reduce reoffending.

Children in Young Offenders Institutions (YOI)

The Policy position through the whole system approach to preventing offending by children and young people, rolled out since 2011, has been that children should be kept out of the criminal justice system, as far as possible. This includes children

in YOI. This is based on early intervention and diversion approaches. Encouraging the use of children’s hearings measures where they come in to conflict with the law and using alternatives such as secure accommodation where a period of detention is required. That policy position remains unchanged. Provisions of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 to end the detention of under 18s in YOI came into force on 28 August 2024. Small, trauma-informed and child-friendly facilities such as secure accommodation will now be used instead.

The Transformational Change Programme will be used to drive and monitor progress, including with regard to the National Strategy for Community Justice and its accompanying Delivery Plan.

Consideration of implementation of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 is underway with partners, with commencement expected to begin during the first half of 2024.

COMMITMENT

Trauma Informed: Prisons Unit

Where young people with care experience are in prison, we will take a trauma informed approach to support them. The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) refreshed the Vision for Young People in Custody in March 2021, recognising the need to adopt an approach to delivery for increasingly complex needs and risk.

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STATUS

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has developed an overarching Mental Health Strategy with a series of outcomes that reflect the needs of the whole population with the specific needs of young people referenced where relevant. The Young People's Strategy Group oversee a plan to ensure that actions are taken to implement the refreshed Vision. This has included:

- Preparing for the incorporation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Legislation into Scottish Law, notably developing a new physical interventions framework. This has been developed taking a human rights based and more trauma informed approach to managing young people in our care, in line with the refreshed Vision and Strategy for women in custody. This will increase the safety for all involved in an episode of restraint.
- Development of specialised training modules for staff recruited directly to residential areas working with and caring for young people and women which has a central emphasis on trauma informed care. Staff are encouraged to reflect and contextualise trauma informed care for both the young people and female populations.
- A workshop with a focus on trauma informed care and mental health care for young people has also been developed to enhance the skills of existing staff.
- Undertaking self-evaluation at HMP & YOI Polmont and an adult establishment to find out about young people and women's wellbeing and the transition from YOI to the adult estate respectively.

Workshops for new and existing staff working with young people were well received by staff who engaged in the learning in a positive manner. The content of all youth products is currently being reviewed by SPS College to ensure they are up to date and relevant to the population.

Four NHS Education for Scotland (NES) **modules** are now available covering the following areas in developing trauma skilled practice:

- Developing your trauma skilled practice 1: understanding the impact of trauma and responding in a trauma informed way
- Developing your trauma skilled practice 2: trauma in children and young people
- Developing your trauma skilled practice 3: understanding the impact on mental health and evidence-based pathways to recovery
- Developing your trauma skilled practice 4: understanding the use of substances to cope with the impact of trauma

NES Scottish Trauma Informed Leaders Training was delivered to senior leaders covering aspects of trauma informed care and approaches. Next steps are rolling out training to senior management teams across the prison estate.

The SPS Mental Health Strategy, which outlines the support to be provided and the interface with key partners to ensure holistic, whole person approach to care, will be published in 2024. It details how various aspects of prison life can aid prevention, promotion, and recovery in mental health being cognisant of the impact of other policies and strategies on mental health in custody, including the Scottish Government's review of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategies. Following publication there will be further engagement with key partners to inform the development of an implementation plan.

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COMMITMENT

Children & The Justice System

We are committed to funding the National Joint Investigative Interviewing Programme to support a three year national roll out of the new Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) for Joint Investigative Interviews (JIIs), which commenced on 1 April 2021.

STATUS

We are continuing to support the implementation of national roll out of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) for Joint Investigative Interviews (JIIs) as part of the Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder Phase. Funding for the National SCIM JII Training Team has been confirmed until March 2025.

The Scottish Child Interview Model is now live in all policing divisions and in 30 local authorities, with the majority of the child population now able to access this trauma-informed approach to joint investigative interviewing. Orkney and Shetland are the only remaining areas to install the new model of practice, with Orkney expected to be live by the end of 2024 and Shetland in 2025. Local multi-agency partnerships, jointly led by social work and police, are leading on making the necessary adaptations to local child protection systems to accommodate the new approach. Supported by child protection partners such as health, education, third sector, SCRA and COPFS, many of these partnerships are cross-authority partnerships, working collaboratively across regions to deliver the Scottish Child Interview Model.

The Scottish Government has provided grant funding to the Children and Young People Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to evaluate the impact of the Scottish Child Interview Model on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people. The evaluation will also look at the impact this new

form of Joint Investigative Interviews has had on pre-recorded evidence being used as evidence-in-chief when cases go to court.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Families: Prisons Unit

We aim to reduce the impact of family imprisonment through a range of ongoing work, including support for families of prisoners led through the Scottish Prison Service's family strategy.

STATUS

The Scottish Government provides support for families impacted by imprisonment through its cross-portfolio grant funding of Prison Visitor Centres. In 2024-25 this will be £807,000.

Prison Visitor Centres work with the families of those in custody, enabling families to access independent and impartial advice, information and support, which meets their needs whilst providing them with practical and emotional help with issues like prison visiting, food poverty and child-focussed support. Visitor Centres also run a range of activities aimed at health awareness campaigns to families who are often hard-to-reach and suffer health inequalities.

The Scottish Government also provides core funding to Families Outside through the CYPFEI & ALEC fund, in 2024-35 this will be £141,750. Additionally, the Community Justice Division of Scottish Government also provide grant funding of £141,773 to Families Outside. Families Outside is a national charity working to improve outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment through support and information for families and for the people who work with them. Families Outside and The Promise worked together on the "Staying

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Connected” project focusing on children, including care-experienced children, with a sibling in prison recognising the importance of adult siblings within a child’s life. Families Outside are now taking forward the outcomes and recommendations from this work.

The SPS Family and Parenting strategy 2024-2029 was internally published for establishments on the 15th of March 2024 and has been published externally on the SPS website. To highlight the release of this important strategy SPS are exploring bringing together SPS Staff and external partners to improve understanding of the impact of imprisonment on families delivering a seminar at the SPS College in October 2024.

SPS has released its corporate parenting strategy and plan in June 2024, both internally to establishments and externally on the website, this aligns with the family and parenting strategy whilst fulfilling SPS responsibilities to care experienced people in our care.

An easy-to-read version of the family and parenting strategy is being developed and will be accessible at establishments and will be made available online at the SPS website.

Support Mothers and Babies in custody: The Scottish Prison Service Mother & baby policy takes a multi-agency approach to the decision-making process of actively promoting the wellbeing and positive life outcomes for babies whose mothers are held in their care. A new national custodial facility for women at HMP & YOI Stirling was opened in 2023 along with two community custody units in Dundee and Glasgow offering support for women who benefit from closer community contact. These new facilities take into consideration the specific needs of women, including multi agency support for mothers and babies in custody and visit arrangements. Consultation with staff and females who have given birth whilst in custody or in the community prior to entering custody has begun and early feedback discusses the importance of transition points for females with babies in custody.

COMMITMENT

Community Justice Division

We continue to invest £3.7 million per annum in third sector voluntary through care services which support short term prisoners leaving prison by providing flexible, practical support to help them reintegrate successfully into their communities.

We will develop and launch a new National Community Justice Strategy, building on progress to date and setting out clear aims with an emphasis on early intervention and encouraging a further shift away from the use of custody.

STATUS

A revised **National Strategy for Community Justice** was published in June 2022, followed by the publication of a **delivery plan** in June 2023, which sets out deliverables to drive improvement nationally towards the aims of the National Strategy for Community Justice.

A Transformational Change Programme (TCP) has been established with the aim of promoting a shift in how we address offending and reoffending, through reduced use of custody and greater use of justice in the community. This TCP, “Shifting the balance between custody and justice in the community”, will support the implementation of the revised National Strategy for Community Justice and its accompanying Delivery Plan.

The change programme will be used to drive and monitor progress in relation to the implementation of the National Strategy for Community Justice and its accompanying delivery plan.

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COMMITMENT

Childrens Rights, Protection and Justice

We will implement Bairns' Hoose by 2025, bringing together child protection, health, justice and recovery services in one setting.

- Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Plan to be published.
- Annual Progress Report for Bairns' Hoose Project Plan to be published spring 2023.
- First Phase of Bairns' Hoose development – The Pathfinder Phase to be launched in summer 2023.

STATUS

Following the publication of Scotland-specific Bairns' Hoose Standards on 31 May 2023, we published a suite of documents on 1 June 2023: our refreshed vision, values and approach, Children and young people: participation and engagement plan and Bairns' Hoose – project plan: progress report and pathfinder delivery plan, which sets out the action taken to date and how we will trial the new Bairns' Hoose Standards in Pathfinder Partnerships.

The Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder Phase was launched in October 2023 with the announcement of 6 successful Pathfinder partnerships and 4 Affiliate partnerships. The selected Pathfinder partnerships are Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Fife, North Strathclyde, Outer Hebrides and Tayside. The Affiliate Partnerships are Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Highland, and the Sycamore Partnership (Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian).

To date we have invested £3.7m during 2023-24 to support the Pathfinder phase of Bairns' Hoose development, with a further £7.23m investment in

the Bairns' Hoose programme during 2024-25.

Supporting partnership learning as we continue to move at pace to successfully implement Bairns' Hoose in Scotland, we have extended the Pathfinder phase to summer 2027. The Bairns' Hoose project team is currently developing specific plans for how the programme will be delivered over the new extended timescale. These plans will be informed by discussion with key stakeholders.

The aims of the Pathfinder phase are for partnerships to trial and test the Bairns' Hoose Standards within each operational and geographical context; learn what works and identify challenges; and produce knowledge about the methods, practices and resources required for implementation.

Supporting these aims, we have developed five workstreams – Analysis, Knowledge Exchange, Quality Improvement and Service Design, Participation of Children and Young People and Funding Support.

The Pathfinder phase analytical approach supports Bairns' Hoose aims by focusing on implementation and process, in order to document the journey to becoming a Bairns' Hoose.

One of the strands of the Pathfinder analytical approach is to coproduce a set of Performance Indicators for all Pathfinder areas. The intention is for Pathfinders to collect and report these back to Scottish Government at the end of the Pathfinder phase.

A Standards Self-Assessment and Readiness Tool (StART) has been developed for Bairns' Hoose Pathfinder partnerships with a dual purpose of starting them on their improvement journey, and to gather evidence to help us understand the position in each partnership area.

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The StART was completed by Pathfinder partnerships in February 2024 and will be completed again in August 2025. Information from the StART will help us to learn about the current state of readiness. It will help us to see where work may need to be targeted across the system and what support is required to meet the Standards in full.

In addition to the analysis of the two StART submissions and the development of Bairns' Hoose Indicators, the analytical approach also includes a qualitative research element, consisting of interviews and/or focus groups with relevant professionals in each Pathfinder area. The aim of the research is to explore in greater depth the Pathfinder starting positions, plans and progress in moving towards operating as a Bairns' Hoose, as well as the position of Pathfinders at the end of the phase in terms of implementation of planned activities, achievement of Standards and identified outcomes.

Providing partnerships and stakeholders with the opportunity to share learning and knowledge with and between all parties, the Knowledge Exchange workstream has been established to support partnerships and stakeholders as they move to implement and deliver Bairns' Hoose throughout Scotland.

Our Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Plan sets our approach to participation and engagement and the actions we will take to deliver. Through this approach, we will make sure that Bairns' Hoose services best reflect the lived experience and views of those who matter most – the children and young people, and families of the children, who have experienced trauma.

We are working closely with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, who will support partnerships to ensure the voice of children and young people is represented in the work and the design of every Bairns' Hoose programme and plan.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Maternal and Child Wellbeing

We will continue to work with Children's Services Planning Partnerships and the Kinship Care Collaborative to improve delivery of holistic whole family support including through our work to:

- Support pregnancy and maternal health and development through implementation of the guidance for schools on how to support young pregnant women/young parents to stay in school; and guidance on Healthy Relationships and consent.
- Support families through preventative health and care programmes, including maternity service, Family Nurse Partnership and health visiting, and initiatives designed for families and early years including: Baby Box, Book Bug and Play, Talk, Read.

STATUS

The guidance for schools about how to support young mothers to remain in education was published in August 2021. This was produced to complement the **Key Messages for Young People on Healthy Relationships and Consent** which were published for practitioners in May 2019. The information leaflet aimed at young pregnant women/young parents in school was published in March 2023, on gov.scot and Young Scot. The Healthy Relationships and Consent for children guidance is still in development, with a view to adapting to parents and carers.

(FNP) is a holistic approach which promotes responsive, sensitive and positive parenting to help break down inter-generational cycles of inequality and poor care giving. Up to 3,000 families per year are supported by the Family Nurse Partnership, and over 11,000 have

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benefitted since the programme began in 2010.

The Family Nurse Partnership continues to be delivered to young, first-time mums across mainland Scotland. **The Health Visiting Service** is offered to all families in Scotland with a newborn and support is provided up until a child starts school. Health Visitors promote and monitor child health and development whilst also providing wider holistic support to the family. This includes partnership working or formal referrals to complementary support services depending on a family's specific needs.

As the core operating model, resource has focused on supporting this age range. 21 and under in particular has a high number of eligible clients. A number of boards have paused or held-off delivering to 21 year olds due to predicted level of demand and increased teenage rates.

Liaising with Health Boards in January/February 2024 to gain insight what capacity is available to progress expansion particularly to 21 year olds based on available resource and modelling of predicted demand. Boards are delivering to capacity, expanding to age ranges was to utilise reduced rates from the core teenage cohort.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Maternal And Child Wellbeing

We will continue our work with Children's Services Planning Partnerships and the Kinship Care Collaborative to improve delivery of holistic whole family support including through our work to support families to access employment or education through provision of early years childcare; and increase financial assistance through doubling of the Scottish Child Payment and further increasing it to £25 by end 2022 when roll out to 6 – 15 year olds takes place.

STATUS

The **Scottish Child Payment** was extended to under 16s and increased to £25 on 14 November 2022. At the same time we introduced auto-award of **Best Start Grant Early Learning and School Age payments** for people receiving Scottish Child Payment, making it easier for people to receive that they are entitled to. Scottish Child payment was increased to £26.70 from April 2024.

The Scottish Government have removed the income thresholds from **Best Start Foods** in February 2024, bringing eligibility in line with **Best Start Grant** and **Scottish Child Payment**, which have no thresholds.

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COMMITMENT

Good Food Nation

STATUS

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 places duties on local authorities and health boards to produce plans of their policies in relation to food and set out what they will do to make those plans real. These plans will set out the outcomes to be achieved in relation to food-related issues, the policies needed to do this and the measures that will be used to assess progress. It is expected that authorities will consider the provisions that they make for the supply of food in the settings for which they are responsible, including care settings for young people, and how these provisions contribute towards achieving the outcomes.



A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

National Carers Strategy

We will develop and publish a **National Carers Strategy** with a focus on COVID-19 recovery and improving carer support in a meaningful and sustainable way. The strategy will focus on carers and their needs, setting out how policies across the Scottish Government can work together with other public bodies to support carers as we recover from the pandemic and beyond.

STATUS

The **National Carers Strategy** was published in December 2022. We have completed year 1 of the Strategy's implementation with most of the 40 actions successfully implemented. Actions for year 2 will be prioritised by the Carers Rights and Support Steering Group.

The Carers Rights and Support Steering Group (who oversee the Strategy's implementation) met in January 2024 to confirm prioritised actions for year 2 and discuss data used for monitoring actions.

COMMITMENT

Definition of Care Experience

We will work with partners across Scotland, including The Promise Scotland, to develop a universal and inclusive definition of Care Experience, we will explore further how this definition can best be reflected in relevant legislation to ensure a consistent and respectful use of language.

STATUS

The Scottish Government will lead a package of consultation work from summer to the end of 2024 to inform the next stage of policy development and in support of the legislative direction to be included with The Promise Bill.

From summer to the end of 2024, we will take forward a programme of consultation and engagement with the care experienced community, working with partners to deliver a co-ordinated package of participation and engagement with children, young people, adults with care experience, and their families. This package of consultation will include:

- Consideration of a universal definition of Care Experience
- Implementing the outcomes of the work to redesign the Childrens Hearing System
- A package of support for young people transitioning out of children's care services
- On the future of fostering.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

Consider Our Language

We will build on the **Each and Every Child Initiative** and will develop further work to address stigma over the course of 2022/23, with input from local partners and our care experienced young people.

We will use destigmatising language at every opportunity and will use certain terminology only where the use of an alternative may create confusion. We will continue to work with The Promise Scotland to identify and use language, across all of our policies and engagement, which respects the views of our people with care experience.

STATUS

The Scottish Government provided funding to the **Each and Every Child Initiative** over a three year period and worked with partners to promote the initiative. Since January 2020, Each and Every Child have been approached by over 130 organisations across Scotland to deliver bespoke training based on Framing Care Experience and the framing toolkit, including local authorities, Scottish Government, Corporate Parents and Third Sector organisations. The initiative has worked alongside 'voices of experience' to help shape and drive the delivery of the initiative.

Within Scottish Government, Each and Every Child learning has been provided to over 300 staff working in roles linked to keeping The Promise. Relevant published documents have been frame checked, using the Each and Every Child toolkit to ensure language and terminology is non stigmatising. These documents include: Staying Together and Connected: Getting it Right for Sisters and Brothers National Practice Guidance; GIRFEC Refreshed Guidance; The Promise Implementation Plan and the supporting Child Friendly Plan. We will continue to promote Each and Every Child across Scottish Government and consider the framing toolkit throughout all communications in relation to people with care experience.

Following the success of the initiative, we have committed to continuing our funding of Each and Every Child. The overall purpose of Each and Every Child initiative for Phase 4 (2024-2026) is to build on the foundations of awareness raising from Phase 3, fostering a deeper sense of ownership and understanding across Scotland of the power of framing recommendations to shift public understanding and to tackle stigma and discrimination. The focused and strategic development of the initiative has huge potential to consolidate practice and culture change across organisations, individuals and communities. This culture change at all levels is vital and necessary to ensure Scotland is able to keep The Promise by 2030.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

Cross border placements:

Some children and young people who cannot live safely at home, come to live in Scotland from other areas of the UK. We are working to deliver solutions to ensure that they are able to experience the same high level of care that we expect for children who start their journey within Scotland, and that their rights are equally upheld.

STATUS

A refreshed version of The National Practice Model was published in September 2022. It sets out a shared framework and approach to identification, assessment and analysis of a child or young person's wellbeing needs. Our partners at the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice are leading work to support local authorities and secure care providers to fully implement the Secure Care Pathway and Standards published in October 2020 in order to deliver a consistent approach. The standards apply to all children in secure care, including those who are placed in to secure accommodation in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish Government is clear that cross-border placements should only occur in exceptional circumstances where the placement is in the best interests of an individual child.

The Children (Care and Justice) Act 2024 ("The Act") received Royal Assent on 4th June 2024. A key focus of this Act is to further regulate cross-border placements of children and young people into Scotland from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to cater for the exceptional circumstances in which these placements are warranted.

Section 28 of the Act focusses on this, by enabling Ministers to prepare and publish standards and outcomes which would apply to care services which host cross-border placements of children. This section also includes powers to ensure that Ministers can prescribe information pertaining to cross-border placements which must be included in an application for care service registration with the Care Inspectorate. Section 29 of the Act extends the power of the Scottish Ministers under section 190(1) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 to regulate cross-border placements of children into Scotland which are underpinned by a non-Scottish court order which appears to them to correspond to a compulsory supervision order (CSO).

Section 30 of the Act also includes a new section 33A of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 for the Scottish Ministers to regulate cross-border placements from England, Wales and Northern Ireland which are legally authorised in that jurisdiction under statute or a court order. Ministers are empowered by this to impose conditions in respect of these placements, to provide for a mechanism for monitoring adherence to these and to set out consequences of breaching them.

We have established a four nations Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning placements involving children who are placed in Scotland whilst subject to a Deprivation of Liberty (DOL) order. This ensures continued focus at national levels to work to meeting the objective of exploring suitable placements in the child's own country before a child is placed in Scotland, wherever that is in the child's best interest.

Taken together, the new powers in the Act will enable Ministers to bolster the existing regulatory framework in relation to cross-border placements to protect and uphold the rights of children placed in Scotland. In addition to this, we will look to build on existing work with our partners across the UK as we implement the Act to achieve the intention that cross-border placements into Scotland are only made in exceptional circumstances, and in the best interests of the placed child.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

A Good Childhood – Children and Young People Vision & Principles

Our vision and principles will inform the development of a comprehensive, evidence based work programme to ensure that the Scottish Government leads and plays its part in delivering the recommendations, ambition and ethos reflected in The Promise’s A Good Childhood. We will establish a stakeholder advisory group, and seek input from people with care experience, to develop and implement this work programme between now and 2030.

We will work with local and national partners to develop a monitoring and evaluation strategy to ensure we can measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan and how it feels for, and the experience of, children and young people affected.

STATUS

We have decided not to establish a stakeholder advisory group for the A Good Childhood elements of the implementation plan. We already have a wide range of well-established stakeholder groups, including the National Leadership Group, with roles and remits which cover our commitments in this area. We will continue to use and collaborate with our existing networks to shape and deliver our work programme. The development of a monitoring and evaluation strategy has been incorporated into work on The Promise Progress Framework being developed jointly by Scottish Government, The Promise Scotland, and COSLA.

COMMITMENT

Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together

The introduction of siblings legislation in 2021 was a vital step in recognising the importance of siblings relationships, and keeping brothers and sisters together and connected. National Practice Guidance was published the same year.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continues to support implementation of the Brothers & Sisters Practice legislation and guidance by working with partners to consider the recommendations of the National Implementation Group, in order to deliver the wholesale positive change that is needed to keep siblings together and connected.

Following publication of The National Practice Guidance in 2021 a National Implementation Group was convened to consider the opportunities and challenges in realising our collective aspiration to keep siblings together. Who Cares? Scotland engaged with a group of children and young people with lived experience as part of this work to ensure their voices were held on sibling rights and how the legislation is being applied in practice.

The Groups **final report** and recommendations was published in June 2023. This recognised the high aspirations in the guidance for sibling relationships and that the legislation provides a strong foundation for change. The Group went on to acknowledge that there are factors within the wider environment, such as the recruitment and retention of social workers, and availability of skilled carers, that challenge our collective ambitions to support siblings. A collaborative approach is therefore required to support the change necessary.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

It is critical to establish a national picture of the extent to which brothers and sisters are placed together, to understand how the policy is being implemented in practice and where further support is required. As such – and as a direct result of the Group’s work, the information that local authorities collect and report to the Scottish Government now includes, for the first time, four new data categories related to siblings.

The purpose of these four data items is to understand the extent to which children are placed together with their siblings in care. We continue to work with local authorities as the approach to sibling data develops in order to understand more fully the reasons why siblings aren’t placed together. Questions on this will form part of future data returns.

A substantial output from the Group was the development of a **Staying Together and Connected: Getting it Right for Sisters and Brothers Learning, Development and Leadership Framework**. This set out the required skills and learning outcomes, taking a tiered approach in order to ensure that children’s rights to stay connected with their siblings are realised and the legislation and guidance are embedded in practice. We encourage all organisations who engage with children and young people to consider incorporating this framework into their own learning and development practices, recognising the importance of children and young people maintaining connections for healthy identity, development and emotional wellbeing.

We are engaging with practitioners and professionals across the children and families sector on the STaC Learning, Development and Leadership Framework; and with partners including the Scottish Social Services Council, to consider next steps in relation to embedding the required knowledge, skills and abilities, as set out in the Framework, into social work and wider education.

We will continue to work with stakeholders including Who Cares? Scotland, Education Scotland, Young Scot and others to understand what work is now required to raise siblings’ awareness of their rights to stay connected to their siblings. This includes work underway to consider the advocacy offer to children and young people and the recommendations and proposals recently presented by The Promise Scotland.

In addition, a Siblings Community of Practice, jointly facilitated with The Promise Scotland has now been established. This forum provides a valuable opportunity for practitioners to reflect and learn from existing practice knowledge. The Community of Practice has met on a number of occasions in 2023/24 and has proven to be a supportive and solution focused space. We continue to engage with the Community to provide regular policy updates and to access the expertise and knowledge of the members as they share learning, practice and knowledge.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

Support Relationships

The **Secure Care Pathway and Standards** were published in October 2020. When fully implemented standards 25 – 27 will ensure that young people are encouraged and supported to maintain and develop relationships with family, friends and people who are important to them.

STATUS

Our partners at the **Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice** are leading work to support local authorities and secure care providers to fully implement the standards to deliver a consistent approach. Resources developed include a self-evaluation, learning and improvement template; a half-day workshop to raise awareness of the **Pathways and Standards**; and a website with resources and case studies.

The **Secure Care Standards Champions Group** meets regularly and allows members to share their journeys, learning and challenges in implementing the standards. The **Care Inspectorate** carried out a review to consider the impact of the standards. The review centred on listening to and understanding the experiences of 30 young people across Scotland and reported in September 2023.

The **Cyrenians Keeping Families Together** project received continued funding through the Scottish Government’s **Cashback for Communities** programme. This means they will continue to support children in secure accommodation and their families, offering practical support, mediation and conflict resolution workshops until 2026.

The Scottish Government will engage with the Care Inspectorate in May 2024 to discuss the findings from their review and progress the recommendations for Corporate Parents.

COMMITMENT

Supporting Parents

The Supporting Birth Parents Whose Child(ren) Have Been Permanently Removed from Their Care fund has been established to fund relational, trauma responsive services.

STATUS

The Scottish Government has made available £800,000 in grant funding to help supporting birth parents whose child(ren) have been permanently removed from their care. The successful applicants were awarded funding in 2022 and 2023.

The participants in the programme will be undertaking tests of change, listening to the voice of the lived experienced of birth parents and using this learning to identify what supports birth parents need when they have had a child removed from them permanently. An evaluation report has shown positive support to birth families.

A third year of funding has been submitted by organisations to continue to deliver services to support Birth parents. The annual report which includes testimonies from birth parents has shown how valuable services have been in supporting parents after child removal.

A Good Childhood for our Children and Young People

COMMITMENT

Youth Justice and Reshaping Our Approach to Secure Care

Where a child's liberty requires to be restricted or deprived, this should be in a setting which is child friendly and rights respecting, with trauma-informed staff. We are committed to safeguarding young people within the Youth Justice system:

We will end the placement of 16 and 17 year olds in young offenders institutions without delay. We will fund care based alternatives to custody and consult on new legislation in spring 2022.

We will continue to explore options around changes to secure care, including working with secure care providers, local authorities and Social Work Scotland to find a sustainable funding model to be implemented over the next 2-4 years,

We will introduce a Children's Care and Justice Bill this Parliamentary term. A consultation was launched in March 2022 on policy proposals including:

We will ensure that all care experienced children, wherever they live, will be protected from violence and experience the safeguard of equal protection legislation.

We will consult on the need for further appropriate underpinning in legislation or guidance to ensure children's rights are protected in care settings.

STATUS

The Scottish Government continues to deliver on vision and consider the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. Provisions of the Act to end the detention of under 18s in young offenders institutions were commenced on 28 August 2024.

Work is underway to establish how secure accommodation needs to be reconfigured to meet needs. This includes understanding the current profile of young people in secure and young offenders institutions, how current or alternative services or provision can meet that need, and where there are gaps. We continue to work with partners – COSLA, secure providers, and Scottish Prison Service – to consider the impact on secure accommodation in Scotland. This includes ensuring capacity through on-going funding of Scottish Government paying for up to 16 beds in secure care as they become available until required by a child living in Scotland.

The **Youth Justice Improvement Board** met in March 2024 to discuss an updated version of the vision to be published in June 2024.

We commissioned the **Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ)** to undertake a project to understand what is required to support secure care services to meet the needs of all children who are deprived of their liberty in the future. The **Scottish Government, COSLA and Social Work Scotland** are represented on a Governance Group which oversees delivery of the project.

An interim report was published in December 2023 which summarises what children and young people and other stakeholders have told CYCJ during engagement sessions, combined with previous knowledge and research. The final **Reimagining Secure Care** report is due in September 2024.

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We introduced The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill (now an Act), which will increase age of referral to the Children's Hearing System to 18. We have commenced provisions which have brought an end to the detention of 16 and 17 year olds in young offenders institutions. The Reimagining Secure Care Project which the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice is undertaking on behalf of the government ran in tandem with the Bill.

Discussions with secure care providers about changes required to augment current provision are ongoing. The current secure care contract has been extended until March 2025. **Scotland Excel** have begun work to consider future commissioning arrangements which will take account of the forthcoming changes.

The **Youth Justice Improvement Board** and implementation groups are continuing to deliver on the priorities within the **Youth Justice Vision** published in June 2021, ensuring that children's rights are respected and that there is reinvigoration of the whole system approach to preventing offending by young people. This includes specific work on community alternatives available across Scotland and the publication of a framework for practitioners on community alternatives to remand.

As well as the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act to address legislative transformation, there are practice and cultural

changes which need to take place to further reduce under 18s in young offenders' institutions and ensure readiness and confidence in alternatives. A range of actions are already underway to address this including:

- Ongoing discussions with key partners including COSLA, Scotland Excel, secure care providers and Social Work Scotland to consider funding of secure care placements from July 2022 onwards, to allow priority capacity for under 18s living in Scotland.
- A workshop with key partners such as secure care providers, Scottish Prison Service, COSLA, the Care Inspectorate and Social Work Scotland to consider alternative options to young offenders' institutions.
- Continue to support the workforce to ensure a caring, relational and trauma-informed response to any challenging behaviour.
- Continue to work with partners including Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group ('SPRAG') to explore all areas which support restraint reduction.

These actions align with ongoing work to develop new human rights-based guidance in the use of physical restraint and seclusion in schools.

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COMMITMENT

Youth Justice

A short life working group was set up in December 2021 under the Scottish Government Collective Leadership Group. Four recommendations were agreed:

- undertaking a trauma informed review of an under 18s pathway to young offenders institutions;
- recognising the needs and rights of the young person and supporting their understanding of court processes to ensure meaningful participation;
- assessing and reviewing key policies through the lens of the UNCRC;
- and identifying and removing legal impediments to alternatives to remand and taking immediate actions where possible to remove under 18s from custody.

STATUS

The short life working group on youth justice concluded in 2022. Four of its recommendations are being addressed through Scottish Government trauma team and Children's Rights Group and community alternatives group under the Youth Justice Vision.

Trauma informed review is being considered by the **Youth Justice Improvement Board**. This includes children in police custody, Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) processes, and court support. A blueprint for youth courts offering support to under 18s was published in 2023. Court support is included in the workplan for delivery of the vision for Youth Justice through the two implementation groups Advancing Whole System Approach and Children's Rights for children in conflict with the law).

The Children's Rights group is considering UNCRC in respect of children in conflict with the law.

Alternatives to remand and removing under 18s in YOI are covered in the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, with provisions to end the detention of under 18s in YOI coming into force on 28 August 2024.

Implementation groups are due to meet throughout 2024.

COMMITMENT

Use of Restraint- Secure Care and Residential Childcare

We will:

- continue to ensure the use of restraint in residential or secure care is not used unless it is the only practicable means of securing the welfare and safety of that or any other service user and there are exceptional circumstances.
- continue to support the workforce to ensure a caring, relational and trauma-informed response to any challenging behaviour.
- work closely with the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group which is exploring definitions of restraint, the data that is held and the training and support available for residential care staff

STATUS

Consideration was given to the legal framework for restraint within wider children's services in the 2022 Care and Justice Bill consultation. Work is ongoing with partners to reduce, and where possible stop, the use of restraint in respect of children in care.

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Secure Care: We continue to work with secure accommodation providers and partners to ensure restraint in such settings is only used as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) are supporting implementation of the secure care standards which include standards around reducing the use of restraint.

The Care Inspectorate carried out a review of implementation of the standards, further discussions will take place from April to consider the findings from the review.

Residential Childcare – The Scottish Government is committed to keeping The Promise and to working with key partners in the children's residential childcare sector to ensure that, together, we implement its aspirations. That includes working with partners to further reduce and, where possible, remove the use of restraint on children and young people in care.

In order for the Scottish Government to understand whether existing supports and tools for the residential care workforce remain fit for purpose, we are seeking to work with partners, such as CELCIS and Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group ('SPRAG'), to build-up a national picture of learning from the work that is currently underway. This will help us to better understand developing and innovative local approaches taking place in the sector and identify the key values, principles and enabling environments that have been required to successfully embed trauma-informed care approaches which have reduced, and in some instances removed, the need for the use of restraint as the child's needs are identified and supported appropriately from the earliest possible opportunity.

Residential childcare workers need to be highly skilled to support the frontline work they do with children and young people in their care. In alignment with The Promise, many providers in the

residential sector have built on the 2013 Holding Safely Guidance to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential child care settings. The aim being for current practice to work within a more blended framework of regulation, guidance, practice support and precise reporting to best serve Scotland's young people.

We continue to work with partners to support the workforce to develop a wider trauma-informed approach to the provision of care within residential childcare settings.

We have continued to work with partners including Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group ('SPRAG') to explore all areas which support restraint reduction. We know that SPRAG have worked with the Care Inspectorate on improved consistency of reporting of restraint and restrictive practices and this has led to improved national data collection by the Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate have also published a restrictive practices self-evaluation tool to support practitioners and services to evaluate how well they are doing in reducing restrictive practices and identifying further areas of improvement. SPRAG are also involved in a variety of activities designed to positively impact efforts to reduce and/or eliminate the use of physical restraint, including responding to Scottish Government consultations and collaborating with the Care Inspectorate on defining restraint.

Residential and secure accommodation both follow Holding Safely Guidance and reporting mechanism with the Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate inspects residential and secure care homes at least once each year. Restraint procedures are part of that inspection process.

The UNCRC Concluding Observations include a range of recommendations about monitoring and restricting the use of restraint and seclusion. These form part of over 190 recommendations that

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are relevant to Scotland on a wide range of issues. The Scottish Government is carefully considering prioritisation of the Concluding Observations. Resourcing constraints within the public sector mean that it will not be possible to progress all of these simultaneously. We published our initial response to the UN Committee recommendations on 25th March 2024 and are developing our approach to advancing these over the next reporting cycle. In developing our approach, we will engage with children and young people to plan and progress a broader programme of awareness raising.

COMMITMENT

Children's Hearings Advocacy

Advocacy: The Promise Scotland will scope a national lifelong advocacy service for people with care experience.

Review of Existing Models is underway: There are a number of models in place that support children and young people and many provide valued and different supports at different points.

Partnership Engagement: Maintaining relationships with existing providers in order to support an informed view of existing impact and to develop a revised model remains a risk factor especially if recommendations to develop and implement a revised model may be financially challenging.

STATUS

Work has been undertaken by The Promise Scotland to scope the need for a lifelong advocacy service for care experienced people and their families. The report was sent to Ministers in December 2023, and the final report published in February 2024.

An external evaluation of children's advocacy in children's hearings will provide a final report in October 2024. Scottish Ministers have committed to share the outcomes of this evaluation with the Parliament by end of 2024. In our response to Sheriff Mackie's Hearings for Children Report, we accepted recommendation 4.1: "There must be changes to the way that advocacy is offered". The Scottish Government agrees, noting that repeated offers of advocacy support are already enshrined in the practice model governing the current statutory children's hearings advocacy provision that has operated since November 2020. The review of existing advocacy models is underway, being led by the Children's Rights team.

On advocacy, urgent work will be required to upskill advocacy workers in eliciting, and then reflecting, voices and experience of infants and babies. This specialist area of work has been acknowledged and it is recognised that significant resource will be required to develop their skills. Non instructed advocacy (NIA) is also of key concern particularly when working with babies and infants, as well as children with complex communication needs. Professionals in the hearings space have mixed views as to the applicability of NIA, and we will work with the Redesign Board to build a consensus on the basis of empirical evidence and practice insights.

There are a number of complexities, including financial challenges that must be considered in relation to developing a revised model for a lifelong advocacy service for people with care experience.

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A Hearings Redesign Board has been established, co-chaired with COSLA, to take a co-ordinated approach to redesigning the hearings system across the next 2 years. It will move at pace and met for the first time in January. Any changes need to be properly planned and sequenced with other important work in the child care and justice sectors.

There is further detail on Children’s Hearing Redesign in the Creating The Right Scaffolding section below.

COMMITMENT

Age of Criminal Responsibility:

Scottish Ministers have a duty to consider a future age of criminal responsibility, and to report to the Scottish Parliament by December 2025. The Advisory Group, established to support Ministers with the review, will provide recommendations for a future age of criminal responsibility by December 2024.

STATUS

The Advisory Group and its four sub-groups continue to meet regularly as we enter the final year of the Age of Criminal Responsibility 3 year Review to take forward matters relating to the review of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (ACR) Act.

The Group has oversight of operation of the Act from January 2022, including consideration and potential delivery of longer-term solutions to implementation matters where interim solutions were put in place for 17 December 2021, including:

- Whether further developments are required for an out of hours service for the provision of court orders authorising certain police investigatory powers with an age of criminal responsibility of 12; and
- Development of health pathways in relation to the taking of forensic samples from children under the age of 12

In addition, the Advisory Group is responsible for:

- Learnings from the ongoing operation of the Act during the review period; and
- Reflecting on the lessons learned from delivery of the Act (valuable contributions and lessons learned have come from the multi-agency learning events which were held in January 2023 and January 2024, therefore, this type of event will take place each year of the review period). The Group held a second Learning Event in January 2024 where over 80 delegates discussed the learning that could be taken from the first two years of implementation of the Act. A full report was presented to the Advisory Group to inform the next steps going forward as part of the review period. The Advisory group sub-groups are looking at capacity and capability enhancements for any future increase in the age of criminal responsibility.

The Advisory Group in March 2024 focused on the work of two of the sub-groups – Data and Research, and Community Confidence. Work began following this meeting on drafting the Report which will be presented to Ministers in December 2024 allowing informed consideration as to whether the age of criminal responsibility should be increased.

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COMMITMENT

Care Experience Transitions, Rights and Wellbeing Team

Care Leaver Payment.

We will invest £10 million per annum to support young people moving on from care through the introduction of a Care Leaver Payment (previously known as the Care Experience Grant): a new one-off payment of £2000 for 16-25 year olds which aims to provide additional financial support to those moving on from care into adulthood and more independent living.

Details on the eligibility criteria, processes and delivery model of the payment are still to be determined and will be set out in regulations in due course. The policy will be developed through engagement and consultation with people with care experience and those with experience of delivering similar support. A public consultation on the payment opened on 3 November 2023 and closed on 26 January 2024. An independent analysis of consultation responses was published on 18 June 2024. The outputs of the consultation will inform ongoing policy development and decision-making in relation to the payment.

STATUS

Work is underway to develop a payment to provide young people leaving care with additional financial security. This is proposed as a Care Leaver Payment. A regulation-making power has been taken in the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to Parliament on 31 October 2023. The power taken will allow the Scottish Ministers to create one or more schemes to give financial assistance to individuals who have had experience of being in the care system. This is named 'care experience assistance' in the Bill. In the first instance, this power will be used to establish the Care Leaver Payment by way of regulations.

The intention of the Care Leaver Payment is to provide additional financial support for young people leaving care by helping reduce some of the financial barriers that young people face whilst moving on from care and into adulthood. The proposal is to deliver a one-off payment of £2,000 to those leaving care at the point of transition into adulthood.

COMMITMENT

Care Leavers Housing Pathways

We will continue to work with partners to implement the 'Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways' report recommendations.

We will continue to employ a multiagency approach to ensure that all care leavers are supported through Continuing Care or transition support to independent living. The Care Leavers Pathway sets out sensible, evidence based next steps to ensure corporate parents act on their legal and moral duties to prevent care leavers experiencing homelessness, at the point of leaving care and later, by fully implementing existing policy and legislative frameworks.

We will continue to ensure people under 26 years old who have previously been in the care of a local authority are exempt from Council Tax.

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STATUS

The **Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways** sets out a number of recommendations designed to protect young people moving on from care, including ensuring consistent implementation of both Continuing Care and Aftercare policy.

Work is progressing on policies such as the homelessness prevention duties and Continuing Care and Aftercare for care leavers, which directly link to the recommendations in the pathway.

We updated the Continuing Care guidance to provide clarity and improve accessibility for all who support young people in accessing the help they are entitled to. This was published on 30th July 2024.

We are carefully considering the current support offer available to young people moving on from care. This includes Continuing Care, Aftercare and broader supports and services. A public consultation on the support required to positively support young people moving on from care went live on the 11th July 2024, and runs until 3rd October.

The Care Inspectorate (CI) is undertaking a Thematic Review of Care Leavers transition services, which will implement recommendation 3 of the Care Leavers' pathway. The review is scheduled to provide a final report in November 2024. We are also working with local authorities to improve the annual Care Leaver data collection. These workstreams will help us to understand our progress in helping young people as they transition out of the care system, and will inform The Promise Progress Framework.

We recognise that youth homelessness is more than a housing issue and that the pathways call for change across youth, welfare, health, justice, housing, homelessness and the children and families' sectors. This cross-sector approach and recognition that opportunities for early intervention can help prevent homelessness underpins the approach to the Ministerial Oversight Group on Homelessness which was recently convened by the Minister for Housing. It brings together ministers from across the Scottish Government to identify the actions required to end homelessness in a range of policy areas including children, young people, care leavers and The Promise.

COMMITMENT

Rented Housing

We will seek to improve accessibility, affordability choices and standards across the whole rented sector in Scotland through A New Deal for Tenants – our rented housing strategy to be published by 2023.

STATUS

The New Deal for Tenants consultation was published in Dec 2021. The timeline for preparing the final strategy will be considered in spring 2024.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

COMMITMENT

Children's Hearings Re-design

We will take forward a redesign of the Children's Hearings System, building on the recommendations from the review led by Sheriff Mackie, with the aim to bring forward any required legislation by the end of the Parliamentary session.

STATUS

The Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) was established by The Promise Scotland in the summer of 2021 to consider the redesign of the current Children's Hearings System in order to keep The Promise. The group was independent of the Scottish Government, chaired by Sheriff David Mackie and with membership from Children's Hearings Scotland, The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, and The Promise Scotland.

The Group reported their recommendations in May 2023. The report contains more than 130 recommendations covering a broad range of policy areas relating to care systems, children's hearings, youth justice, legal representation, access to justice and preventative support for families amongst others. The Scottish Government published its response to Sheriff Mackie's review in December 2023. This accepts the majority of recommendations made in the report.

Key emerging themes include: that proposals should be rights focused; highlighting the potential role of family group decision making and restorative practices; consideration of alternatives to a solely volunteer based model of hearings; consideration of the role scopes of various professionals currently in the system and thoughts on what should happen after a redesigned hearing takes place.

A Children's Hearings Redesign Board has now been established, consisting of senior leadership from the key statutory organisations responsible for the delivery of the children's hearings system. This group will be responsible for the governance and oversight of all non-legislative aspects of the redesign of the children's hearings system. The group met for the first time in January 2024, and is progressing work to develop plans and priorities across 2024 and 2025. A public consultation on legislative aspects of Children's Hearings Redesign was launched on 26 July 2024. A planning sub-group consisting of operational leads from the statutory bodies has also been established to take forward actions emanating from the Children's Hearings Redesign Board.

COMMITMENT

Care Inspectorate

We will collaborate with The Promise Scotland to scope a new, holistic framework for governance and accountability of social care services.

STATUS

The establishment of a National Care Service (NCS) is the most ambitious reform of public services in Scotland since devolution. It is necessary to deliver the consistency and quality of care and support across Scotland that people deserve.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

As part of the tripartite discussions with COSLA and the NHS, it was agreed that shared accountability for the NCS will be discharged in the form of a National Care Service Board (NCSB). There is continuing engagement with COSLA and NHS Boards to agree a way forward on a model of shared accountability, which will include a framework for national oversight and governance of social work, social care support and community health to drive consistency, monitor outcomes and embed an escalation process if things go wrong.

The Promise is clear that if Scotland is to shift its practice to support, prioritise and nurture relationships, then we must shift our accountability structures. Part of this relates to inspection. We are committed to ensuring regulation and scrutiny centres on listening to children about how they are cared for, their ability to thrive and measures the things that matter to children, young people and their families.

The Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation of Social Care in Scotland, (IRISR) Chaired by Dame Sue Bruce, and engaging with The Promise Scotland, considered how regulation and inspection of social care support and linked services can ensure a human rights-based approach that delivers improved outcomes for people.

The IRISR Recommendation Report was published on 27th September 2023 and made 38 high level strategic recommendations. **The Scottish Government response** to the IRISR Recommendation Report was published on 6th March 2024, accepting all 38 recommendations, recognising that significant amounts of work are already underway that will in part or fully address a number of the recommendations.

To ensure the recommendations are implemented in a way envisaged by the IRISR implementation will be phased, and work has already commenced on two new workstreams focused on recommendations 15 and 33. We will also establish a programme of work that will enable us to track progress for current and future work to progress the recommendations.

We will continue to work closely and collaboratively with regulators, providers, partners and with those who have lived and living experience of social care support and linked services in all aspects of this work.

The Promise Scotland is engaged in the independent review of Inspection, Scrutiny & Regulation including representation on the stakeholder panel, one of two panels providing specialist advice to the Chair to inform recommendations.



Creating the Right Scaffolding

COMMITMENT

National Social Work Agency

We will consider establishing a National Social Work Agency to promote consistency of support and provide national leadership and strategic oversight of the profession.

STATUS

A National Social Work Agency (NSWA) will be established and given the important links and function that social work will have within the wider national NCS structure, we will ensure necessary reporting links and close working between the NSWA and the National Care Service Board. Working with partners across the public sector the NSWA will provide professional leadership and have national oversight of the social work profession – driving improvements in social work education, training and development, national workforce planning, improvement approaches and providing effective support for implementation of policy in local systems.

We are working across the Scottish Government, and external stakeholders, including Cosla and Social Work Scotland. The intention is to have a Shadow NSWA established by spring 2025 and to be fully operational by spring 2026.

COMMITMENT

Public body appointments

Any of Scotland's Boards and Public Bodies which have an impact on the care system must ensure that the values of The Promise are embedded in recruitment frameworks. We will explore how we ensure that appointments to public bodies that are within the gift of the Scottish Government can reflect this commitment.

STATUS

There is real energy for change across the system. This is represented in organisational structures, training and approach to business. Corporate parenting plans present clear messages and commitments to prioritise the best outcomes for care experienced children and young people, accepting responsibility for their welfare, and advocates for their needs.

The Promise Collective provides a strong framework of partnership working and sharing of information and activity underway across organisations to monitor and report progress. This includes connecting activities through corporate parenting duties, sharing best practice in meeting corporate parenting duties, and linking corporate parenting plans. Further work is required to explore how values of The Promise are specifically reflected in recruitment frameworks.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

COMMITMENT

National Care Service – Children’s Services

We will work with The Promise Scotland to build an evidence base to understand the best governance, financial arrangements and models of care to assess how we can best keep The Promise. This will explore the options for the future of children’s services from an evidence based position and enable us to assess the best way to keep The Promise.

STATUS

The establishment of the National Care Service (NCS) will change social care, community health and social work services landscape in Scotland. It will provide opportunities to strengthen systems, secure better ways of cooperative working, ensure performance issues can be identified and addressed transparently and supportively, and ensure better outcomes for people accessing support, in addition to improving experiences of those delivering care.

The National Care Service Bill will reform the integration schemes currently existing under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, making them a fundamental constituting element of the National Care Service. It will also make these reformed integration schemes accountable to a new National Care Service Board. The consequence of reforming the integration schemes this way is that some children’s services will be part of the NCS. This is because some local authorities made a decision to voluntarily delegate these functions under existing integration schemes.

COMMITMENT

Information Sharing for People With Care Experience

We will develop a blueprint for creation and control of information which will empower people to decide who and where key information about them is made available.

STATUS

This work, led by The Promise Scotland, will examine how protocols with key institutions can support provision of the right information at the right time. It will consider the National Digital record as proposed in regulations as part of the National Care Service Bill. There is opportunity to include any additional legislative changes as part of the proposed Promise Bill in 2025-26.

The Promise Scotland initial report of findings on development of a blueprint for the creation and control of, and access to, information about people with care experience is due to be published in 2024.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

COMMITMENT

Advanced Social Work Practice Framework

We will establish an Advanced Social Work Practice Framework which will set out the structures which support social workers to progress through different career phases and describe a cohesive and supportive series of academic, learning and development, and work based opportunities to support the workforce, both now and in the future.

STATUS

The Scottish Government, alongside partners within the Social Work Education Partnership, have undertaken considerable engagement activity with frontline social workers, managers and professional leaders who continue to form part of the stakeholder engagement of the overall project. Over spring 2023 the **Advanced Practice Framework (APF) Subgroup** ran several engagement events and spoke to over 200 social workers, both in person and online, to ensure that we, as a profession, get this right. We use the feedback to inform development of the Advanced Practice Framework for Social Work. We will then carry out further engagement with the social work workforce in autumn 2024.

The framework is an opportunity to influence a culture which promotes, acknowledges and values evidence based practice and to recognise the role experienced practitioners can play in using their knowledge and expertise to support the future workforce. The Advanced Practice Framework is due to be launched spring 2025.

COMMITMENT

Social Work Paraprofessionals and Common Core Framework

We will establish a practice framework which will ensure a national approach to the learning and development opportunities for paraprofessionals within the social work workforce and explore the expansion of routes into further education.

We will also develop a common core training framework for the integrated children and family's workforce which will focus on the core skills values and learning that the workforce will require to deliver family support and rights based practice.

STATUS

Consideration will be given to developing a framework for paraprofessionals following implementation of the **Advanced Social Work Practice Framework**. However, as part of work to widen entry routes into the profession more broadly, we are scoping the opportunity to introduce a Graduate Apprenticeship for social work.

The development of the refreshed Common Core continues to progress at pace. This work is being led by the **Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)**, in collaboration with a short-life working group of key stakeholders. This will provide updates to the workforce development sub-group, which in turn reports and seeks endorsement via the Children and Families National Leadership Group.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

COMMITMENT

Trauma-Informed Social Work Services

From 2022 onwards we will roll out a national programme of implementation support to develop trauma-informed social work services across Scotland.

STATUS

A workplan has been agreed with key partners to ensure Scotland’s social work services are able to recognise where people are affected by trauma, and respond in ways which reduce risks of retraumatising and supports recovery. Actions are progressing through **the Trauma Responsive Social Work Services (TRSWS) Programme**.

Delivery of the extensive implementation support and learning programme commenced in October 2023, initially with four areas, Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, Scottish Borders, Stirling and West Lothian Councils. Work is taking place across children’s, justice and adult social work services and workforce. New leadership support, workshops, training materials and products have been developed, and existing resources have been tailored to be used within a broad range of social work systems and contexts.

The team has delivered Trauma Skilled Practice training, with follow up support, to over 200 newly qualified and early career social workers, across Scotland. Initial analysis of feedback indicates this has been very well received and appropriately targeted at a suitable practice level for this component of the workforce.

Progress on the workplan will be continuously monitored by the **TRSWS Partnership Delivery Group** and updates will be shared on the **website**.

Initial learning from early implementation sites will help inform scheduling, with further areas across Scotland to be supported by the team from 2024 until December 2026. An independent evaluation of the programme will be commissioned which will help identify next steps. The team will review learning from the Trauma Skilled Practice training offer and share findings with partners and make any necessary adaptations.

COMMITMENT

Workforce Objectives

We are committed to workforce planning through the **Children and Families Strategic Partnerships Outcomes Framework**:

- to ensure continuity current policies to future national policy initiatives in health, social services and the delivery of the national outcomes delivered by implementation of GIRFEC, UNCRC and The Promise.
- to develop cross-sector messaging; a multi-disciplinary and common core training and skills framework for the integrated workforce.
- To develop the necessary methodology and tools to enable workforce planning at a national level.

STATUS

The Scottish Government have developed a joint **Workforce Improvement Plan** with COSLA and key stakeholders which seeks to address the recruitment and retention challenges facing the Social Work profession which include, implementing workforce improvements and refining social work vacancy data to enhance increased accuracy in planning for the demands of the future workforce.

Creating the Right Scaffolding

Work is progressing in collaboration with stakeholders including COSLA, Social Work Scotland, Scottish Association of Social Work, Unison and the Scottish Social Services Council to ensure the Improvement Plan is influenced and informed by the voices of social work and other key stakeholders. This includes initial agreement to develop a new national framework for social care and social work as part of ongoing discussions on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill.

COMMITMENT

Workforce Objectives

We will progress the delivery of a rights and relationship based practice and trauma informed training programme for the integrated children and families workforce.

The National Trauma Transformation Programme provides accessible, evidence-based trauma training resources and support for implementation.

A renewed shared ambition with COSLA for a trauma-informed workforce and services with the launch of a new National Trauma Transformational Programme and website.

STATUS

With the significant work done to date to progress shared ownership of this agenda across various policy areas within Scottish Government, and work with key partners to develop resources, 2024/5 will be focused on bedding in good practice, improving communication and awareness of resources available and supporting colleagues in their work to drive forward trauma-informed approaches to their policy areas.

Work continues with COSLA, the Improvement Service, Resilience Learning Partnership, and NHS Education for Scotland to support organisations to develop and implement trauma-informed approaches to their workforces and via their services.

In the Scottish Government, policy areas are driving forward policy approaches around trauma informed practice drawing on available resources and expertise as required. The central team's focus will be continuing to play a coordinating and supporting role while looking at the relationship with Public Service Reform and issues around communication and reporting around activity that would enable greater awareness of the activity taking place locally and nationally.

COMMITMENT

Workforce Planning and Development

We will progress an integrated whole system approach to workforce planning and workforce development for the children and families workforce, including the adult care workforce that support transitions.

STATUS

We have set up a short life working group with the purpose of oversee the development of the necessary methodology and tools to enable workforce planning at a national level, based on accurate modelling of demand for services, as well as the adequate workforce resources needed to meet such demands. Phase 1 will consist of a data improvement project which will allow us to understand true demand for services as well as the truth state of the workforce; in Phase 2, we will

Creating the Right Scaffolding

develop a modelling approach in order to allow us to project demand for services, as well as the workforce resources required in order to meet it.

Local workforce planning considerations will connect with Childrens Services Planning duties and the role of Childrens Services Planning Partnerships Governance fora and joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

COMMITMENT

Workforce Regulation

A review of Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) codes of practice to ensure consistency with the skills and practice requirements of The Promise focused on trauma informed family support etc, will see revised codes expected to be launched in mid-2024.

The Promise Scotland will work with the Care Inspectorate, SSSC and other key stakeholders to create an enabling practice environment which supports and evidences a move towards relationship based practice.

STATUS

A review of Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) codes of practice to ensure consistency with the skills and practice requirements of The Promise focused on trauma informed family support has been completed. The new codes of practice was launched on 7th May 2024. SSSC has committed to work with The Promise Scotland on a myth busting campaign on workforce regulation and standards of practice, which supports the shift towards relationship based practice and the development of ongoing relationships.

The Care Inspectorate have given relationships greater prominence in the new quality improvement frameworks that underpin inspections.

COMMITMENT

Universal and Targeted Health Services

We will continue to review the role of universal and targeted health services, such as health visiting and family nurse partnership, particularly during pregnancy and the earliest years of life, to identify where it could be further strengthened to respond more consistently to the needs of families at the earliest stage.

STATUS

Scotland's **Universal Health Visiting Pathway** offers support to all of Scotland's young families from pre-birth until a child starts school. As part of our commitment to ensuring that the Health Visiting service continues to deliver for families, we commissioned an evaluation of the Universal Health Visiting Pathway. The main **phase 1 evaluation reports** were published between December 2021 and June 2022. We are working with Health Board representatives and wider stakeholders to identify and consider appropriate next steps based on recommendations from the evaluation.

For young, first time parents, the **Family Nurse Partnership** programme is provided pre-birth until their child reaches two and we are currently working with NHS Boards to widen the eligibility criteria so more people can benefit.

Building Capacity

COMMITMENT

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Delivering our commitment to incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law.

Our UNCRC implementation action plan includes building the capacity for public authorities to take a child rights-based approach in the design and delivery of services and ensuring that children, young people, their families and all of Scottish society are aware of and understand the UNCRC.

STATUS

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill was reconsidered by the Scottish Parliament on in December 2023 and the Bill was approved unanimously. The Bill received Royal Assent in January 2024 and is now the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Duties under the Act commenced on 16 July 2024.

COMMITMENT

Bail and Release from Custody Bill

A Bail and Release from Custody Bill will be introduced this Parliamentary session.

STATUS

A Bail and Release from Custody Bill was brought forward to reform how remand is used, and how release mechanisms work for certain prisoners. We consulted on this between November 2021 and February 2022 and the Bill was passed on 22 June 2023, becoming an Act on 01 August 2023.

COMMITMENT

Children's Care and Justice Bill

A Children's Care and Justice Bill will be introduced this Parliamentary session to enable improvements to youth justice, secure care, aspects of the children's hearings system, victims' services and the criminal justice system.

STATUS

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, was introduced in December 2022, and passed by Parliament on 25th April 2024 and became an Act on 4th June 2024. The Bill will enable improvements to youth justice, secure care, aspects of the children's hearings system, victims' services and the criminal justice system.

Building Capacity

COMMITMENT

Housing Bill

A Housing Bill will be introduced to Parliament as soon as possible after summer recess in 2023. This will be a wide- ranging Bill including measures to both strengthen existing homelessness prevention legislation and introduce new duties on public bodies to ‘ask and act’ to prevent homelessness before someone reaches crisis point.

STATUS

The Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 26th March 2024 as per our commitment in the 2023-24 Programme for Government.

This Bill will enable the delivery of our commitment for longer-term private sector rent controls; tenants’ rights and other protections; and duties aimed at the prevention of homelessness. It’s right that we focus our action to support those most vulnerable, especially during these challenging times, in order to achieve our shared goal of delivering safe, affordable, and quality homes.

We will build on the strong housing rights that already exist for people who are homeless by bringing a renewed focus on prevention so that households do not have to go through the trauma and disruption of homelessness. The Homelessness Prevention Duties are based on the values of shared public responsibility, earlier intervention and providing more choice and

control through avoiding crisis.

By intervening at an earlier stage, and encouraging services to work together to respond to people’s needs, we can ensure fewer people and families are faced with having to re-build lives affected by homelessness. If homelessness can be more effectively prevented, life chances and outcomes will be improved and savings will be made across public services.

The homelessness prevention provisions, if passed, will introduce a duty on the relevant bodies, listed in the Bill, to ‘ask and act’ about housing situations. In practice this will mean staff asking people they come into contact with through the exercise of their current functions about their housing situation and acting within their existing powers to prevent homelessness where a risk is evident. We know that people who become homeless can often be in contact with different services and organisations before they reach that point. We want to ensure that chances to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity are not missed.

Ask and act forms the cornerstone of a wider set of reforms to homelessness legislation which will take us closer to our ambition of ending homelessness.

The legislation will also change local authorities’ duties to people who are threatened with homelessness, requiring them to take action up to six months before homelessness appears imminent rather than the current two months requiring them to take reasonable steps to support households. This may include providing services such as family mediation where appropriate.

Building Capacity

COMMITMENT

Legislative Programme to Support Change

Legal Aid Reform Bill

A Legal Aid Reform Bill will be introduced in this Parliamentary session, to ensure that the system is flexible, easy to access and meets the needs of those who use it.

STATUS

The Scottish Government's "**Vision for Justice in Scotland: three year delivery plan**", published in November 2023 contains an action to engage with key stakeholders to inform and shape future legislative proposals in relation to the reform of legal aid. Building on previous reviews and consultations, the Scottish Government is now, in the first instance, engaging with the Scottish Legal Aid Board to identify possible legislative proposals with the aim of providing a modern, forward-looking and responsive legal aid and assistance framework for Scotland. The aim is to put in place a legislative framework that will best support citizens to defend their rights, resolve problems and settle disputes. Some of the proposals include making provision for simplified and enhanced grant funding powers to enable that more services be targeted, where and when possible. Engagement will be progressed in 2024/25.

COMMITMENT

Legislative Programme to Support Change

Promise Bill

We will introduce a Promise Bill to make any further legislative changes required to keep The Promise by the end of this Parliamentary session.

STATUS

The purpose of The Promise Bill is to make any further legislative changes required to keep The Promise. For example this may include, provisions required to implement recommendations of the Children's Hearings System working group and recommendations of The Promise Scotland in relation to a national lifelong advocacy service for people with care experience.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with partners including The Promise Scotland and COSLA to identify areas where a legislative direction may support delivery of The Promise.



Building Capacity

COMMITMENT

Review of Current Legislative Framework

We will undertake a review of the legislative framework relating to the care system in Scotland.

STATUS

We will undertake a review of the legislative framework relating to the care system in Scotland. We will consider the desirability and extent of a re-statement of the law in this area so that the law relating to the care system is identifiable and understandable before considering whether a Bill re-stating the law is necessary.

COMMITMENT

Preventative Spend

Our ambition is that, from 2030, we will be investing at least 5% of all community-based health and social care spend in preventative whole family support measures that will enable us to create a Scotland where more children will only know care, compassion and love, and not a care system.

STATUS

Discussions are ongoing with Public Services Reform and health finance colleagues to ensure consistent understanding of the commitment, including engagement with health finance to determine how to identify current spend on this area. We will develop a forward looking plan on how to meet this commitment as part of our investment approach.

COMMITMENT

Social Outcomes Investing

We will explore the opportunity to undertake a social outcomes approach to investment.

STATUS

This will be taken forward as part of our investment approach.

COMMITMENT

Widening from Outcomes to Experience

We will ensure that data, evidence and information about experiences and relationships are prioritised in the way we monitor progress towards keeping The Promise.

We will develop a subset of indicators which will support the National Performance Framework Outcome “we grow up loved, safe, respected and that we realise our full potential”.

Building Capacity

STATUS

The Scottish Government is working with COSLA and The Promise Scotland to develop a framework of key aims, outcomes and performance indicators to inform review of progress. The Promise Progress Framework will form the basis for reporting progress against Plan 24-30 and will be launched in alignment with The Promise Scotland Plan 24-30.

The purpose of The Promise Progress Framework is to provide Scotland with a shared framework that allows us to understand where we are in (the journey towards) keeping The Promise at any given time. This tells the story of the processes in place to generate change and how these are impacting the outcomes we need to improve, which allows us to be responsive in guiding what needs to happen next. This is aligned to the National Performance Framework and Children, Young People and Families Outcomes Framework to make sure we are understanding whether the care experienced community is getting what we all need to thrive, and how this work is contributing to Scotland's overall aims.

Our work to keep The Promise is anchored by our Theory of Change which hypothesises the primary drivers, secondary drivers and activities which need to be undertaken across Scotland to realise our collective vision. In order to guide our work over the coming years, we need to better understand how our work is impacting the experiences and outcomes of the care experienced community.

Part 5 'How We Are Monitoring Change' sets out in detail how the National Performance Framework, the Children, Young People and Families Wellbeing Outcomes Framework, The Promise Progress Framework, and The Promise are aligned to enable us measure how our activity is impacting the aims of The Promise.

COMMITMENT

The Promise Collective

We will establish The Promise Collective, co-chaired with The Promise Scotland, to support alignment and cohesion of activities.

STATUS

The Promise Collective was established in 2022 with a key aim to align the improvement work underway across the system. A key element of this is to connect and provide a route for joint working and ambition by linking research and evidence to practice and policy.

The group was first convened in June 2022, co-chaired by The Promise Scotland, COSLA, and The Scottish Government. Membership included CELCIS, Who Cares? Scotland and the Improvement Service. The focus of the group has progressed over the two year period to consider the development and agreement of core aims, outcomes and indicators for joint monitoring and reporting of progress. Joint working on this has been supported by the Verity House Agreement.

In 2024, The Promise Collective has widened further to bring together the work of organisations including, the Care Inspectorate, Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

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