

Plan 21-24

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the
promise

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The Vision

On 5th February 2020, a promise was made to Scotland's infants, children, young people, adults and families.

By 2030, it must be kept.

For Scotland to #KeepThePromise it will mean that love is no longer the casualty of the 'care system,' but the value around which it operates. There will be deliberate, persistent attention to upholding safe, loving relationships that are important to children and young people.

Wherever safe to do so, Scotland will make sure children stay with their families and families will be actively supported to stay together. The wider structural and social inequalities that impact families' abilities to stay together and to thrive will be tackled so that no child or family in Scotland is left behind.

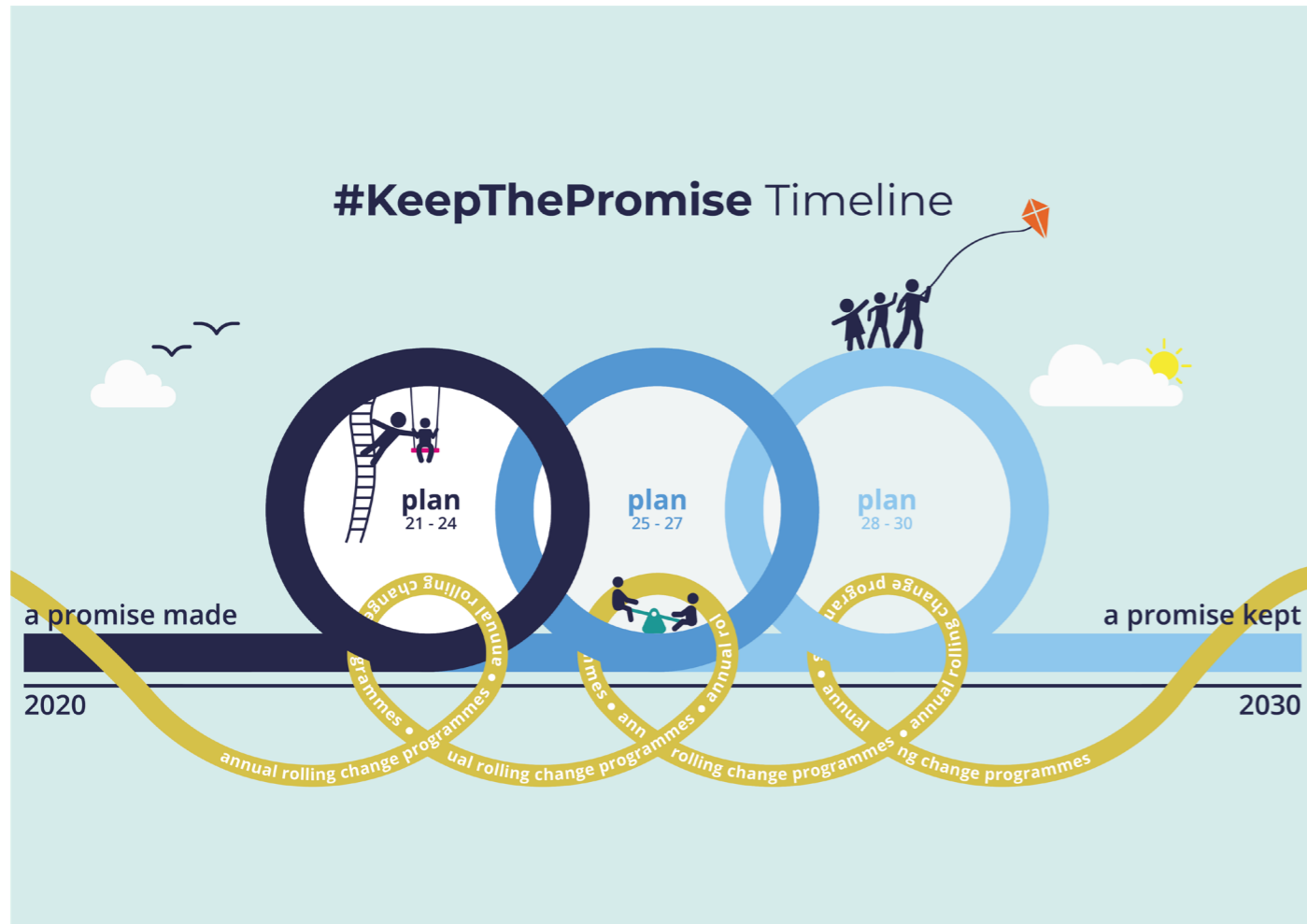
Children, young people and their families will be listened to, respected, involved and heard in every decision that affects them. Where children and families need additional or intensive support, it will be given in timescales which meet the needs of the child. The workforce will be supported to provide the support children and their families need to flourish. Care will be re-orientated and (the 'system') decluttered to create a sustainable approach, that upholds and cherishes relationships.

This is immediate and urgent work - what can change now must change now. It also needs broad and deep work that engenders long lasting change, so that there is never a need for another Care Review. For all that change to be made and importantly felt and kept, it will be done within the remaining nine-year timeline.

Year One, the transition year, is now complete.



The Vision



Work to #KeepThePromise between 2021 and 2030 will be shaped by a series of three Plans, each lasting for three years and outlining the priorities and action across that period.

Each Plan will build on the progress made by the one before it to make sure transformational change happens across all the Care Review's conclusions.

Plan 21-24 focuses on the period from 1 April 2021 until 31 March 2024. It outlines a set of outcomes that should be concluded by 2024. Shorter-term targets associated with those outcomes will be articulated within **The Change Programme**.

In late 2023, The Promise Scotland team will embark on the work to develop **Plan 25-27** to cover the second three-year phase before **Plan 28-30** is laid out to finalise Scotland's commitment. By which time, the Promise will have been kept.

The Vision

The outcomes outlined in **Plan 21-24** are intentionally ambitious but no less than what children and families deserve and what Scotland has already committed to through its National Performance Framework, that children and young people:

“grow up loved, safe and respected so we can realise our full potential.”

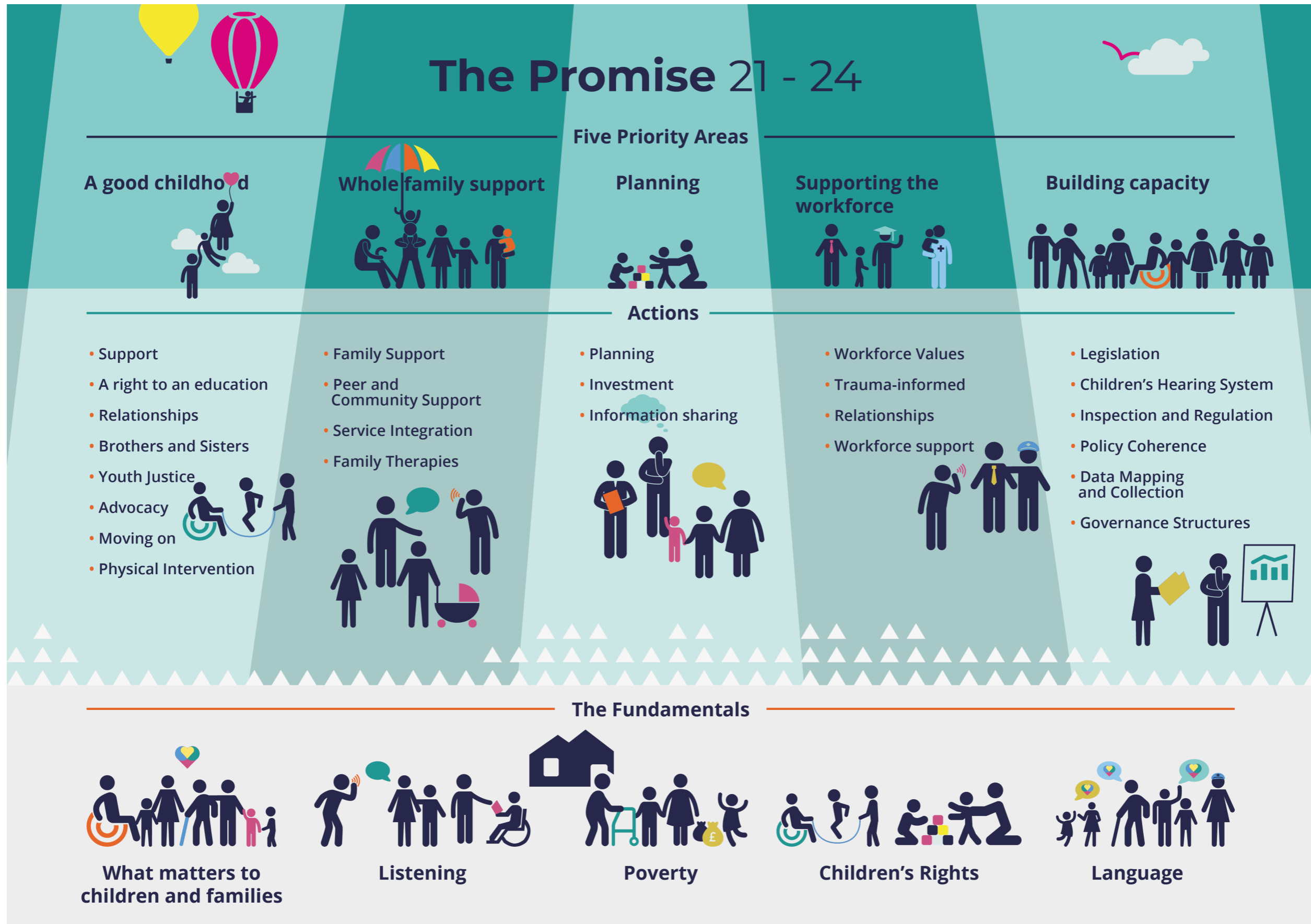
The [Independent Care Review](#) carefully listened, for over three years, to thousands of infants, children, young people and families, many of whom did not feel loved, were not kept safe, were not respected, and were not supported to achieve their potential.

On 5th February 2020, Scotland listened to the [Independent Care Review](#) conclusions and all political parties in Scotland promised to implement them in full.

Now Scotland must act to keep that promise.

To make sure that happens, **Plan 21-24** outlines Scotland's route map, providing key priorities and areas of focus under which organisations will work to achieve the required change over the next three years.

Plan 21-24: In Summary



Plan 21-24: The Detail

The Care Review showed that the 'care system' is not a system.

“The current 'care system' operates within complex legislative frameworks, is bureaucratic and expensive, and does not operate as a single entity. It does not universally uphold the rights of children and does not provide the context for loving relationships to flourish.”

the promise, page 26

“For services to work for children and families, they must be shaped around children and families instead of around policy areas, budgets, legislation or monitoring.

Scotland must facilitate a conversation that ensures wider appetite for change and take the lead through practical legislation, policy and practice change. The landscape is cluttered, complex and does not provide a clear frame to support children, families, decision makers and service providers.”

the promise, page 26

Plan 21-24: The Detail



The intention is not to build a new system.

Rather, Scotland must work to **build a country that cares, made up of services that work** to meet the needs of children and families and that stand ready to be accessed where they are needed, when they are needed. The system, the scaffolding around services, policy, budgets and legislation are secondary, and must shift to facilitate what children and families need and reflect what they have said matters at every level.

Plan 21-24 focuses on the first three years of this change. By following the route map it provides, Scotland will have worked to transform its services and to shift its landscape by 2024. It will be ready to continue this work and bring all the various parts of it together to build a Scotland that cares, and will continue to care, as soon as possible by 2030 and beyond.

This began with the Independent Care Review's conclusions, all of which have been translated into key areas of change.

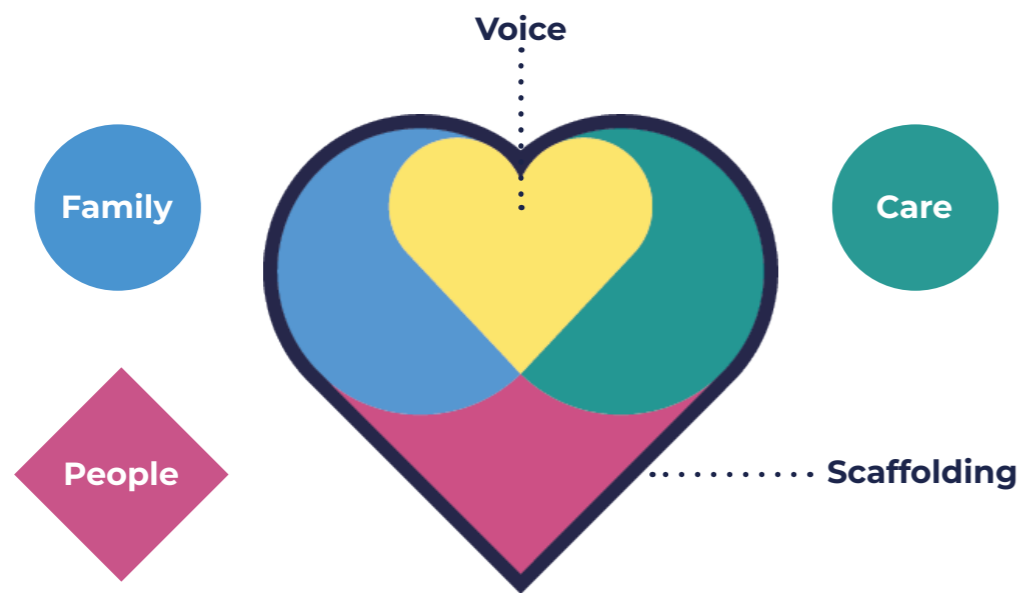
In February 2020, The Promise outlined the five foundations on which the work of change must be grounded:

- **Voice:** Children must be listened to, and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring decision-making culture focused on children and those they trust.
- **Family:** Where children are safe 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.
- **Care:** 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.
- **People:** The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.
- **Scaffolding:** Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

These foundations gave Scotland a clear and simple starting point: where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together, to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties they encounter.

Everything else, national, or local, must seek to enable this at every level. Children staying where they feel loved and are safe must become the standard while the ways in which families are supported, and children are cared for, is re-calibrated. Only once this option has been exhausted can it be determined that it is not possible for children to live with their families. If this is determined, it must be done in a time frame which meets children’s needs for safe, loving care. Children must feel they belong in a loving home, stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so, feel loved by their carers or adoptive parents, and be given all the support they need to thrive.

The ordering of the Care Review’s conclusions, as detailed in The Promise across the five foundations, have been translated into five priority areas of change for Plan 21-24.



Plan 21 - 24

The Fundamentals



What matters to children and families

At all stages in the process of change, what matters to children and families must be the focus. Organisations will be able to demonstrate that they are operating from their perspective rather than the perspective internal to the 'system'.



Listening

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families, and those on the edge of care will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding what they have heard from children and families into the work that they are doing to #KeepThePromise.



Poverty

Scotland will have made consistent improvement in reducing poverty, in line with the definitions and targets in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. Organisations will be able to demonstrate how they are ensuring that they play their part in mitigating the impacts of poverty.



Children's Rights

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children will be able to demonstrate that their rights under the UNCRC are being consistently upheld.



Language

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and young people will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work.



There are parts of the ‘care system’ that must contract, parts that must expand, some aspects that need a complete overhaul while others must be protected and preserved, with the following FIVE fundamentals embedded into all.

Whatever work organisations are doing in relation to care experienced children and families, these 5 fundamentals must form a solid core around which everything operates.

What matters to children and families

For too long, and still today, systems and services prioritise the system rather than the people for whom services are set up to serve.

At its core, **Plan 21-24** will see a recalibration of support so that what matters to children and families is the highest priority and the cornerstone of how services operate.

“For Scotland to truly to be the best place in the world for children to grow up, a fundamental shift is required in how decisions are made about children and families.”

the promise, page 7

What matters to children and families:

At all stages in the process of change, what matters to children and families must be the focus. Organisations will be able to demonstrate that they are operating from their perspective rather than the perspective internal to the ‘system’.

Listening

Listening to and, crucially, making sense of what is heard from children and families will be embedded into all practices and processes that engage with children and families to ensure their voices are heard and they are involved in every decision that affects them.

Where support is required for children and families to have their voices heard and to participate in decision making, this will be identified and provided immediately, with the support remaining for as long as it is needed.

Regardless of how children and family’s voices are heard, there must be a full and considered exploration of how listening, shared sense-making and shared decision-making will be embedded into practice and mechanisms to actively use what is heard, must be put in place.

“Scotland must listen to, and keep listening to, its children. It must never again be necessary to conduct a Care Review of this scale because, as a nation, Scotland will continuously listen, reflect and act upon what children are saying.”

the promise, page 30

Listening:

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families, and those on the edge of care will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding what they have heard from children and families into the work that they are doing to #KeepThePromise.

Poverty

Children live in families who, in turn, live in communities, and thus are impacted and affected by more than just their experiences of care. There are myriad social, structural and economic factors that directly contribute to the experiences and outcomes of children and their families.

The impact of poverty is felt throughout Scotland's 'care system'. The ability to make significant improvements to family support, and to families' abilities to thrive, is linked to the economic health and wellbeing of Scotland's communities and families. It is not possible to separate the two. To make change, Scotland must focus on up levelling family income, with an ongoing commitment to alleviating the impacts of poverty. Furthermore, those who care for children in any context in Scotland must become champions for those children and do everything in their power to reject stigmatising attitudes, words, and stories about poverty. Scotland can no longer be complicit in the distorting narratives that blame individual people's supposed failings for their circumstances, rather than changing the system that fails those individuals.

The accountability for poverty reduction is already held by [Poverty and Inequality Commission](#), however the interconnections between poverty and interaction with the care system are so profound that poverty must be a core principle throughout [Plan 21-24](#).



“Children growing up in poverty are over-represented on the child protection register and are more likely to be removed from their families...”

the promise, page 17

“There must be significant, ongoing and persistent commitment to ending poverty and mitigating its impacts for Scotland's children, families and communities...”

the promise, page 18

Poverty:

Scotland will have made consistent improvement in reducing poverty, in line with the definitions and targets in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. Organisations will be able to demonstrate how they are ensuring that they play their part in mitigating the impacts of poverty.

Children’s Rights

Plan 21-24 is for all children in or on the edge of care, no matter their setting of care or their legal status. It is imperative that Scotland does not divide the population to specific minority groups. This does not mean ignoring the huge diversity of experiences that are represented within the ‘care community’. Rather, it means that careful attention must be paid to the experiences of every child and care experienced adult. This must not be done in a way that is tokenistic or that creates more categories, processes and criteria for support. In 2021, the UNCRC will become law. Through its people and services, Scotland will take a child rights-based approach for every child in or on the edge of care, and **Plan 21-24** will support how this is made the reality.

“Scotland must respect, uphold, champion and defend the rights of children and recognise that their rights are most often realised through relationships with loving, attentive caregivers. Scotland must fully incorporate and uphold the UNCRC.”

Scotland must recognise children’s status as human beings with a distinct set of rights. Children are not passive recipients of care. The system must revolve around the rights of the child so their health, education and right to play (for example) are never compromised by contact with the ‘care system’. The system must uphold their rights at every turn.”

the promise, page 27

Children’s Rights:

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children will be able to demonstrate that their rights under the UNCRC are being consistently upheld.

Language

The people that care for Scotland’s children will be able to evidence that the language they use subscribes to an underpinning values base that does not stigmatise children and families. Children and young people will be supported to ensure professionals use the terms, names and words that the child or young person prefers, when describing issues that relate to their lives and experiences. There will be times where the statutory framework requires certain terms to be used, but this should be done sparingly, with the aim of the reduction of stigmatising language at every opportunity.

As examples:

- ▶ When The Promise Scotland refers to ‘data’ it means ‘information about children and their families’.
- ▶ When The Promise Scotland refers to children and families who are ‘under supported’, it means children and families who are often referred to by others as ‘vulnerable’ but is recognising that this is not part of their identity. Rather, it is often the ‘system’ that makes children and families vulnerable through its lack of adequate support.
- ▶ When The Promise Scotland talks about ‘families’, it means all families including families of origin, kinship families, foster families and adoptive families.

“Scotland must change the language of care. Language must be easily understood, be positive and must not create or compound stigma...”

the promise, page 87

Language

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and young people will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work.

Plan 21-24: Priority Areas



There are five priority areas that make up Plan 21-24.

These priority areas are to focus on making significant and substantive changes to the lives of care experienced children, families, and young people across Scotland.

The priority areas also lay the groundwork for ongoing change that will be built upon in Plan 25-27. To ensure that the scaffolding that surrounds the lives of children, families and young people is there to facilitate their rights and ensure that what matters to them is what matters to those organisations with responsibilities towards them: there needs to be a significant programme of redesign.

Design will happen in 21-24 with substantive structural change taking place in 25-27.

Plan 21-24: A Good Childhood



“Care experienced children and young adults have told the Care Review that their time looked after by the state often felt cold, overly professionalised, stigmatising and uncaring.

Scotland should be a good parent to the children it has responsibility for. That means carers and workers must act, speak and behave like a family so that Scotland can be the best parent it can be. Scotland must stop stigmatising the children it cares for.”

the promise, page 87

“Secure attachments, based on loving, consistent relationships, must be the bedrock of every decision made about children. This principle must not operate only at a strategic level but be part of the everyday practice of the workforce and family-based carers.

The way Scotland cares must be underpinned by the guiding principle of attachment and must be informed, responsive and reflective about the nature and impact of trauma. Every care setting must facilitate a relationship-based approach, the workforce must be trained and supported to attune to children’s physical and emotional states. This practice of ‘tuning in’ to how children are feeling, enables a process of co-regulation and stability where children can learn to manage stress and anxiety. The workforce must be supported to be present and emotionally available to the children in their care.”

the promise, page 73

Children who have been removed from their family of origin and live in and around the 'care system' will have a good, loving childhood.

Ensuring that children in Scotland's 'care system' feel loved, their needs are met, and their rights are upheld is a priority for 21-24. This change is urgent, it must be a focus for all organisations that have responsibility towards care experienced children and young people.

● By 2024

● Support

Every child that is 'in care' in Scotland will have access to intensive support that ensures their educational and health needs are fully met.

Local Authorities and Health Boards will take active responsibility towards care experienced children and young people, whatever their setting of care, so they have what they need to thrive.

see the promise, pages 51 and 89

● Right to education

Care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school. There will be no barriers to their engagement with education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils.

School improvement plans will value and recognise the needs of their care experienced pupils with robust tracking of attendance and attainment so that support can be given early.

Care experienced young people will be actively participating in all subjects and extra-curricular activities in schools.

The formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from education will end.

Schools will support and ensure care experienced young people go on to genuinely positive destinations, such as further education or employment.

see the promise, pages 71 to 72

● Relationships

All children living in and around Scotland's 'care system' will be maintaining safe, loving relationships that are important to them.

There will be no barriers to 'contact' and children will be supported to have time with people they care about.

see the promise, page 63

● Brothers and Sisters

Scotland will stop the practice of separating brothers and sisters, unless for reasons of safety.

Relationships between brothers and sisters will be cherished and protected across decision making and through the culture and values of the people who care for them.

see the promise, page 62

● Youth Justice

The disproportionate criminalisation of care experienced children and young people will end.

16- and 17-year-olds will no longer be placed in Young Offenders Institutes for sentence or on remand.

There will be sufficient community-based alternatives so that detention is a last resort.

Children who do need to have their liberty restricted will be cared for in small, secure, safe, trauma-informed environments that uphold their rights.

see the promise, pages 89 to 91

Advocacy

All care experienced children and their families will have access to independent advocacy at all stages of their experience of care.

Advocacy provision will follow the principles set out in the promise.

Care experienced children and young people will be able to easily access child centred legal advice and representation.

see the promise, pages 114 to 116

Moving on

Decisions about transitions for young care experienced people who move onto independent living or need to return to a caring environment, will be made based on individual need.

Each young care experienced adult will experience their transition as consistent, caring, integrated and focussed on their needs, not on 'age of services' criteria.

Housing pathways for care experienced young people will include a range of affordable options that are specifically tailored to their needs and preferences. Youth homelessness will be eradicated.

see the promise, pages 68 and 92 to 93

Physical Intervention

All care experienced children, wherever they live, will be protected from violence and experience the safeguard of equal protection legislation.

Restraint will always be pain free, will be used rarely, and only when required to keep a child safe.

There will be well communicated and understood guidance in place that upholds children's rights and reflects equal protection legislation.

The workforce will feel supported to respond to behaviour in a trauma informed way that reflects a deep understanding of the children in their care.

see the promise, pages 85 to 86

Plan 21-24: Whole Family Support



“Where children are safe 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 listen to and absorb the overwhelming evidence of the lasting pain that removal has caused children, families and communities. This must result in a fundamental shift of thinking about when a child should be removed from their family.”

the promise, page 16

“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. There will always be some children who cannot stay with their families. Some will need to be away from their family for a short time, others will never live with their family again while many return later and as young adults.”

the promise, page 19

All families need support at different times of their lives and family support is a crucial emphasis for 21-24. The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises family as the fundamental group in society and the natural environment for growth and wellbeing. Supporting families is a children's rights imperative.

'Families' means all families including families of origin, kinship, foster and adoptive families. Support will not be predicated on the setting of care.

Supporting families to stay together and thrive was an imperative before the pandemic and is of even greater import now.

● By 2024

● Family Support

The 10 principles of intensive family support will be embedded into the practice (planning, commissioning and delivery) of all organisations that support children and their families, directly or indirectly.

- ▶ Holistic and relational
- ▶ Therapeutic
- ▶ Non-stigmatising
- ▶ Patient and persistent
- ▶ Underpinned by children's rights
- ▶ Community Based
- ▶ Responsive and timely
- ▶ Work with family assets
- ▶ Empowerment and agency
- ▶ Flexible

see the promise, pages 57 to 58

● Peer and community support

There will be a consistent, national approach to ensure there are places in every community for parents of young children to meet other local parents, to stay and play with their children, and get support and advice.

see the promise, page 49

● Service Integration

Scotland's family support services will feel and be experienced as integrated to those who use them.

see the promise, chapter 3 and chapter 6

● Family therapies

All families will have direct and clear access to family therapies and specific support across a range of issues, so that accessing support is seen as something that a range of families may need throughout life.

see the promise chapter 3

Plan 21-24: Supporting the Workforce



“The workforce needs support, time and care to develop and maintain relationships. Scotland must hold the hands of those who hold the hand of the child.

Scotland must place trust in its workforce to develop and nurture relationships, enable their capacity to care and love and provide support to make this part of daily life.

As well as access to advice and networks, carers must be given time to focus on developing relationships, and to reflect on whether these are delivering what the child needs. The boundaries and barriers that prevent nurturing relationships developing and lasting, such as not allowing friendships between residential workers and children after they have moved on, must be removed.”

the promise, page 21

Plan 21-24: Supporting the Workforce

Children experience the ‘care system’ through people. Over **Plan 21-24**, support for people who care and continue to care if times get tough, will improve. There will be consistency of approach, values and understanding across Scotland’s workforce.

● By 2024

● Workforce Values

There will be a national values-based recruitment and workforce development framework in place and adhered to by all organisations and professions involved in supporting children and their families.

see the promise chapter 5

● Trauma-informed

Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families and those on the edge of care will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding trauma informed practice across their work and within their workforce.

see the promise chapter 5

Ongoing Relationships

There will be no blanket policies or guidance that prevent the maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them. Settings of care will be able to facilitate the protection of relationships that are important to children and young people.

see the promise chapter 5 and page 79

Workforce support

A new framework of support will be in place to ensure people involved in the care of care experienced children and young people feel valued, encouraged and have supportive relationships for reflection with high quality supervision and environmental conditions.

see the promise, pages 107 to 108

Plan 21-24: Planning



“Scotland must avoid the monetisation of the care of children and prevent the marketisation of care.

There must be strategic, needs based planning for children so that they are provided with warm, relational, therapeutic, safe, loving environments when they are required.

Scotland must make sure that its most vulnerable children are not profited from. The application of that principle must be delivered in a way that does not impact the current delivery of good, important services for children.

Follow the Money and The Money demonstrates that Scotland needs to take a different approach to how it invests in its children and families. There is no place for profiting in how Scotland cares for its children.”

the promise, page 112

There needs to be a different approach to investment and planning.

National partners have a significant role to play in ensuring a new context for funding, investment and planning.

Children and families live in local communities and use local services. It is important that their experiences and outcomes are not determined simply by which local community they live in or local service they use. Planning and investment should be nationally coordinated to ensure that children and families get what they need.

Whilst the majority of the promise relates to matters which are reserved to The Scottish Parliament, the [English Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) has relevance in respect of cross-jurisdiction issues.

● By 2024

● Planning

Scotland will have a national, strategic planning process in place that ensures that children who are cared for away from their family of origin 'belong to a loving home.'

The planning process will reflect the needs of Scotland's children and young people whilst operating with the expectation that more children will remain with their families.

It will reflect the principles of the promise ensuring:

- ▶ Scotland's most vulnerable children are not profited from (page 111)
- ▶ Standards of care are consistent (page 111)
- ▶ End to the selling of care placements to Local Authorities outside Scotland (page 110)
- ▶ Acute and crisis services are phased out to promote early intervention and prevention (page 111)

[see the promise chapter 6](#)

● Investment

Investment in the lives of children and families will be considered strategically and holistically in the context of their experiences.

The Human and Economic Cost modelling that underpinned Follow the Money and The Money reports will be embedded into organisational and budgeting processes across Scotland. That process will have involved organisations working together to spread investment and align budgets.

[see The Promise, Chapter 6; The Money; Follow The Money](#)

● Information Sharing

Organisations with responsibilities towards children and families will be confident about when, where, why and how to share information with partners.

Information sharing will not be a barrier to supporting children and families.

[see the promise, page 36](#)

Plan 21-24: Building Capacity

Plan 21-24: Building Capacity



“Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

The current ‘care system’ does not operate as a system. At its worst, it can perpetuate and worsen the trauma that many children have already experienced. At present, the ‘care system’ and its associated elements does not enable children to feel loved, safe and respected. Scotland must facilitate a conversation that ensures wider appetite for change and take the lead through practical legislation, policy and practice change. The landscape is cluttered, complex and does not provide a clear frame to support children, families, decision makers and service providers.”

“The current ‘care system’ operates within complex legislative frameworks, is bureaucratic and expensive, and does not operate as a single entity. It does not universally uphold the rights of children and does not provide the context for loving relationships to flourish.

Scotland must create an approach to care where maintaining, sustaining and protecting loving relationships is possible and much more probable.

In order to make the change required, the scaffolding of the future approach to care must be re-orientated to protect and promote loving, long lasting relationships. This must be done with the expectation that the approach is safe, upholds rights and is open to scrutiny.”

the promise, page 25

Over the next 3 year, there will be a focus on work that ensures that the structural underpinning of the 'care system' is orientated to the needs of children and families. This work to build capacity and coherence reflects the planned obsolescence of The Promise Scotland. It will not always be there to provide oversight and accountability and the structures need to move to ensure that the scaffolding around the 'care system' facilitates and upholds children's rights.

● **By 2024**

● **Legislation**

Over the course of the next Parliamentary term, there will be identifiable progress made towards ensuring Scotland's legislative framework around the breadth of the 'care system' is coherent and cohesive, upholds the conclusions of the Independent Care Review and is compliant with the UNCRC.

see the promise, page 112

● **Children's Hearing System**

The Children's Hearing System will have gone through a redesign process.

That redesign process will bring together children and families, and organisations that hold the responsibility, to rethink the structures, processes and legislation that underpin the hearing system.

The aim will be to ensure there are coherent, cohesive and collaborative proposals on an operating framework for The Children's Hearings System that has been designed with children and families.

That redesign process will be underpinned by:

- ▶ giving effect to the promise;
- ▶ ensuring compliance with the UNCRC,
- ▶ upholding the original intention of The Kilbrandon Review that children involved in offending need care and protection; and
- ▶ ensuring The Children's Hearing System and The Courts can facilitate child friendly justice that upholds children's rights and enables their effective participation.

see the promise, pages 39 to 44

● **Inspection and Regulation**

A new, holistic framework for inspection and regulation that values what children and family's value, will have been scoped and developed.

It will understand the necessary legislative change required to focus on children's experiences and will be underpinned by the principles set out in the promise and give full effect to the secure care pathway and standards.

see the promise, pages 119 to 120

● **Policy Coherence**

There will be cohesive alignment in the policy initiatives and frameworks across Scotland. Policy development across Scotland will reflect the realities of people's lives and create a coherent policy environment.

The focus of the 21-24 period will be on implementation and alignment not inquiries and reviews.

see the promise, page 25

Data Mapping and Collection

Scotland will have a cohesive central picture of all data on the processes and systems that directly and indirectly impact on children and their families, including wider socio-structural factors.

The data picture will have been used to fully align data systems, collection and analysis methodologies to what matters to children and families, and the needs of those who take decisions on how best to support children and their families.

[see the promise, page 114](#)

Governance Structures

All public appointments to any of Scotland's Boards and Public Bodies which have an impact on the 'care system' will ensure that the values of the promise are embedded in recruitment frameworks.

The governance landscape around the various Boards, networks and groups that sit around the 'care system' will be rationalised to enable effective and accountable shared working around the lives of children and families.

[see the promise chapter 6](#)

Plan 21-24: The Context

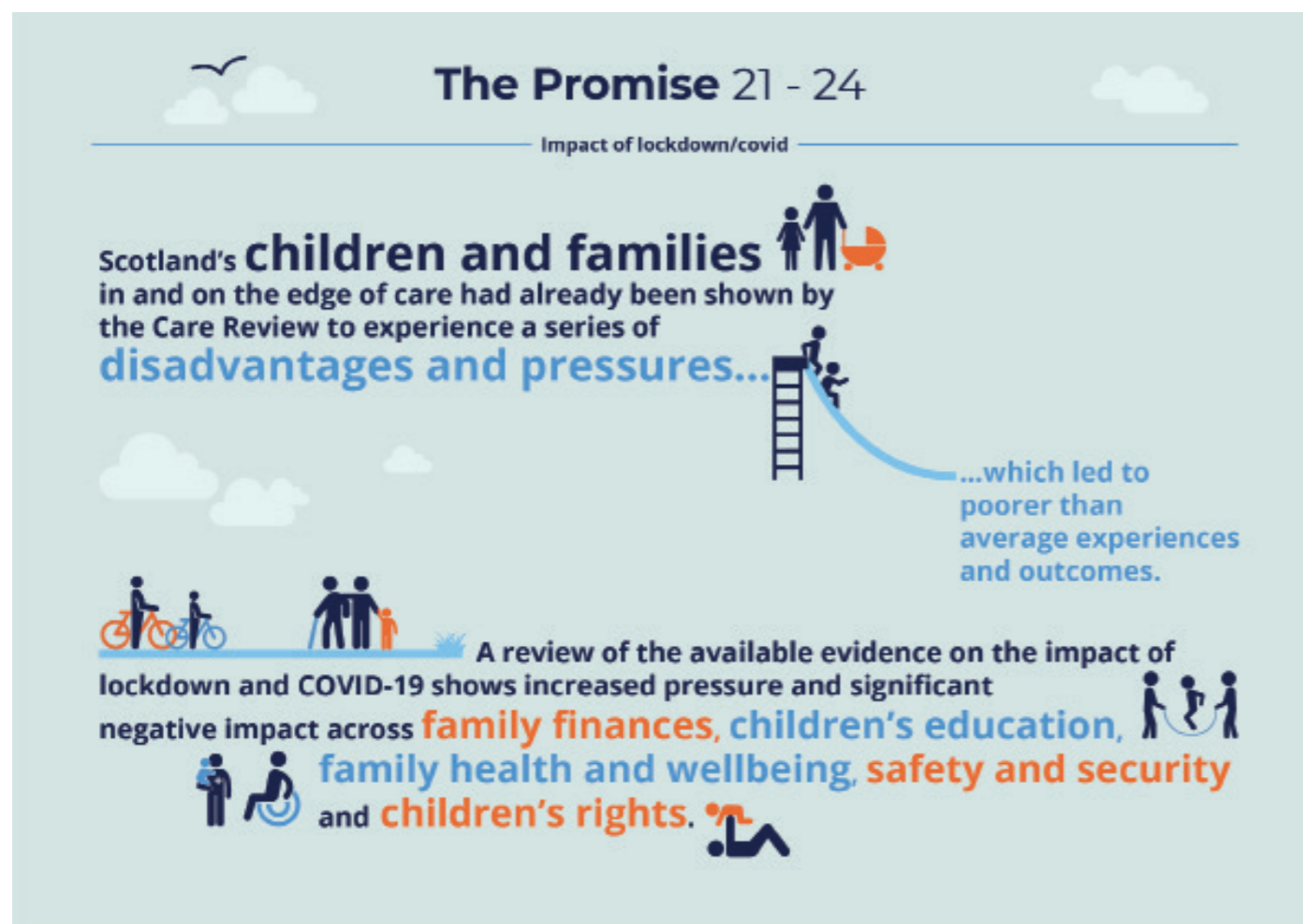
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Plan 21-24: The impact of the pandemic

In March 2020, just five weeks after the acceptance and endorsement of the Independent Care Review's conclusions by all political parties in Scotland, Scotland went into 'lockdown' in response to COVID-19. Work that was already in place to support those with responsibility to #KeepThePromise, and understand their place and role to change, was paused as Scotland's public services responded to the pandemic.

From the very beginning of the initial lockdown phase, there were concerns about the negative effects of increased isolation on children and their wellbeing - from not seeing their friends, to schools being closed, and not seeing trusted adults. There was recognition of the deeper impact of restrictions on Scotland's children and families in and on the edges of care. The Scottish Government recognised that the restrictions may make some children need more support, including some children who were not previously considered to be at risk.



Plan 21-24: The impact of the pandemic

Scotland's children and families in and on the edge of care had already been shown by the Care Review to experience a series of disadvantages and pressures which led to poorer than average experiences and outcomes. A review of the available evidence on the impact of lockdown and COVID-19 showed increased pressure and significant negative impact across family finances, children's education, family health and wellbeing, safety and security and children's rights.

Data collection and the reviewing of evidence about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, with initial analysis showing these concerns to be well founded.



Plan 21-24: The impact of the pandemic

Data collected shows that there are 9% fewer children 'in care' in Scotland in 2020 than there were in 2019. There were 39% fewer children 'entering care' between April and July 2020, the first full months of the pandemic, than there were between April and July 2019. The weekly data collected on the number of children 'entering care' to track the impact of the pandemic show that the numbers have remained consistently lower than in previous years¹.

Taken together, this shows that the experiences of children and families and the impacts of the pandemic on their lives have been immediate and enduring, but it is partial information.

There are fewer children entering the 'care system' in 2020 than in 2019 and this is a trend that is continuing. Given the reported impacts of the pandemic on children and families it is plausible that this is a further impact, but it is not possible to determine what this means in reality. What support are families receiving? Does that support mean they are able to stay together therefore the reduction is positive? Or does it mean that families are at greater risk with less support?

The impacts reported by children and their families provide an understanding of their experiences throughout the pandemic. The numbers show that things have changed from previous years, but neither tell the whole story on their own. At the moment, Scotland does not have effective data and information collection and analysis mechanisms to understand the realities of families' lives.

Evidence of the impact of COVID-19 also reinforced that public services are not 'fit-for-purpose' in a crisis. New ways of working were quickly adopted and systems were circumvented as attempts were made to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on service delivery.

The service response across Scotland throughout the pandemic has familiar underpinnings and yet there is reason for fresh hope.

¹ Chief Officer Group weekly vulnerable children monitoring data

Plan 21-24: The impact of the pandemic

Children and families are most likely to come into contact with care at a time of profound personal crisis. The public services exposed by COVID-19 as not fit-for-purpose are the ones that have been used to support families in crisis situations for decades. The evidence pulled together by the Care Review repeatedly showed that all too often this can result in greater crisis, placing pressure on families who are already struggling and pressure on a system that cannot cope with the job it needs to do. The way in which organisations have responded to make changes throughout the pandemic that might otherwise have taken years, shows that where there is a will, massive change is possible.

Scotland made its commitment to #KeepThePromise before the pandemic was a reality. The impact of COVID-19 create even greater urgency.

However, COVID-19 has also shown that it is the adaptations to the public service landscape that have brought hope, with public services identifying and responding to need in a more compassionate, nimble, reflective way throughout 2020.

The rapid changes that have taken place in public services over the last year, further demonstrate that change can happen at pace and that the 10-year life span to #KeepThePromise is achievable.

The Plan to #KeepThePromise will build on all of that work.

Plan 21-24 was always intended to cover the period 2021-2024 as referenced in the [Independent Care Review](#)'s final reports. Covid-19 has radically altered the landscape across Scotland but the impact of the pandemic does not change the core work programme. It expands on it, adds new layers to it and creates a greater urgency for change.



It also brings hope. Those that committed to #KeepThePromise back in February 2020 are still committed today. The strength of that commitment has endured throughout, in the context of loss, insecurity and weariness. As the work to rebuild continues in earnest in 2021, it is now time for those with responsibilities to children and families to refocus on what 5,500 experiences said during the Care Review and how the promise made to Scotland's children and families can be kept in its entirety.

In contrast to the constantly changing 'external' environment, the system view of children in care has remained relatively static since 2007 with the population fluctuating within 14,060 and 16,248. This means that for over a decade, Scotland has had, at any one point, around 15,000 children in care each year². Although that figure is useful for overall service planning, it does not present a full picture and the relatively static population over a long time period raises questions about the impact of successive policies designed to support children and their families better and the ability of the system to drive change by itself, for itself.

This section covers the work The Promise Scotland team has been doing to devise **Plan 21-24** and the Change Programme. Its focus therefore is the planning methodology deployed during autumn and winter 2020 and early 2021 to build collaborative implementation and not **Plan 21-24** content, for this please go to page 8.

Over 100 organisations spoke to, submitted plans and engaged with The Promise Scotland following a structured engagement period in the autumn of 2020. The engagement period was to support consideration of how each organisation intended to #KeepThePromise made to Scotland's children and families. Local and national government, national bodies and agencies, local and national organisations across public, third and private sectors and those with statutory responsibility for children and families, directly engaged with The Promise Scotland team. All these groups submitted plans, reports and survey responses to outline what they would do, the support they would need, and what help they could offer to ensure Scotland will #KeepThePromise.



Plan 21-24: How it was devised

The engagement period also provided an opportunity for organisations to reflect beyond their initial commitment on their readiness for change, and the barriers that currently exist for them in implementing the conclusions of the [Independent Care Review](#).

The Promise Scotland analysed all of this engagement, benching it against the ambition of the promise and sequencing the conclusions to ensure that the right things happen first to accommodate the 10 year time frame.

To ensure the impact of the pandemic was as fully understood as possible, the commitments made were considered in the context of the impacts reported by children and families themselves, and ongoing quantitative data collection on service delivery and support for children and families throughout 2020.

This identified a number of key areas where children and families reported their lives had been severely impacted:

- ▶ service delivery
- ▶ safety and security
- ▶ health and wellbeing
- ▶ children's rights
- ▶ operation of the Children's Hearings System
- ▶ education
- ▶ family finances

Plan 21-24: How it was devised

The breadth of these impacts means that recovering from the pandemic and working to #KeepThePromise requires more than just individual organisational change.

To establish how to fit together all the individual submissions, a careful and systematic analysis of every submission was undertaken set against the context of the Care Review conclusions. This context is vital. The Promise Scotland did not simply amalgamate everything it received. Plans, commitments and responses were analysed alongside the updated evidence framework and with the ambition of the promise at the forefront to establish whether organisations could go faster, if they could do more, and determine what the systemic barriers to change actually were.

The Promise Scotland also mapped the reviews, commissions and inquiries to track alignment and divergence.

All this work provided a basis for a new approach of collaborative implementation which is based on joint working and shared understanding. The Promise Scotland can provide coordination that will be leveraged to maximise the collective resources and capabilities across Scotland to #KeepThePromise.

In recognition that the implementation of strategies is not a static process, **Plan 21-24** will be accompanied by a **Change Programme** that goes into more detail about how the change committed to will be achieved, and by **who and in what order**.

The **Change Programme** will be dynamic and interactive, adapting to changing circumstances – like COVID-19 – to ensure it is flexible and agile enough to adapt to meet the needs of infants, children and young people and their families in the everchanging external environment.

Plan 21-24: How it was devised

The Change Programme will initially focus on activities taking place in 2021/22 and evolve throughout the duration of **Plan 21-24**. This aligns with statutory budget and planning cycles. At the same time, The Promise Scotland will be evaluating whether this structure works and can facilitate and support transformation.

The progress Scotland makes to #KeepThePromise will have to be monitored. Tracking this progress is the job of The Promise Oversight Board.

The targets set for Scotland will set a pace for change and determine how that change, and progress toward it, will be measured. All these targets will reflect what the children and families told [The Independent Care Review](#) was needed.

The Promise Scotland is designing a **Measuring Change and Monitoring Progress Framework** to enable Scotland to track progress of the Change Programme against what is set out here in **Plan 21-24**. The Oversight Board will scrutinise that progress and decide whether it is on track to #KeepThePromise.

To create **Plan 21-24**, all the Care Review's conclusions were sequenced and mapped to reflect the shape of the lives of children, young people and their families, as opposed to the 'system', and are inter-linked and inter-dependent.

This means there is a chronological order in which the work to #KeepThePromise should be done to ensure all necessary steps are taken to achieve transformational change.

Taken together, **Plan 21-24** and the **Change Programme** cover the entirety of the conclusions of the Care Review and lay out how the complex and difficult work to #KeepThe Promise will be tackled, at a national and a local level to all children and all families, across Scotland.

Plan 21-24 is ambitious - making it a reality will require commitment, strength, humility, and honesty.

Plan 21-24: Measuring Change and Monitoring Progress



To #KeepThePromise, the number of children in care should decrease and the resource and opportunities for families to access support, if and when they need it, should increase. These are targets Scotland has set itself in making the commitment to #KeepThePromise.

The fragmentation and multiple components of care means that driving down the numbers of children removed from their families and driving up access to support for families who need it, is multi-faceted and involves multiple agencies. There will be many targets within these high level aims which will be specific to care settings, actions and service delivery.

Primary responsibility for setting these targets and tracking progress towards #KeepThePromise lies with The Promise **Oversight Board**. Whilst the Board operates on no formal basis and does not have any specific powers to compel action, this work needs more than bare accountability. It needs a collaborative approach. Therefore all those working to #KeepThePromise will be accountable to the Oversight Board who are, in turn, accountable to the care community.

Plan 21-24: Measuring Change and Monitoring Progress

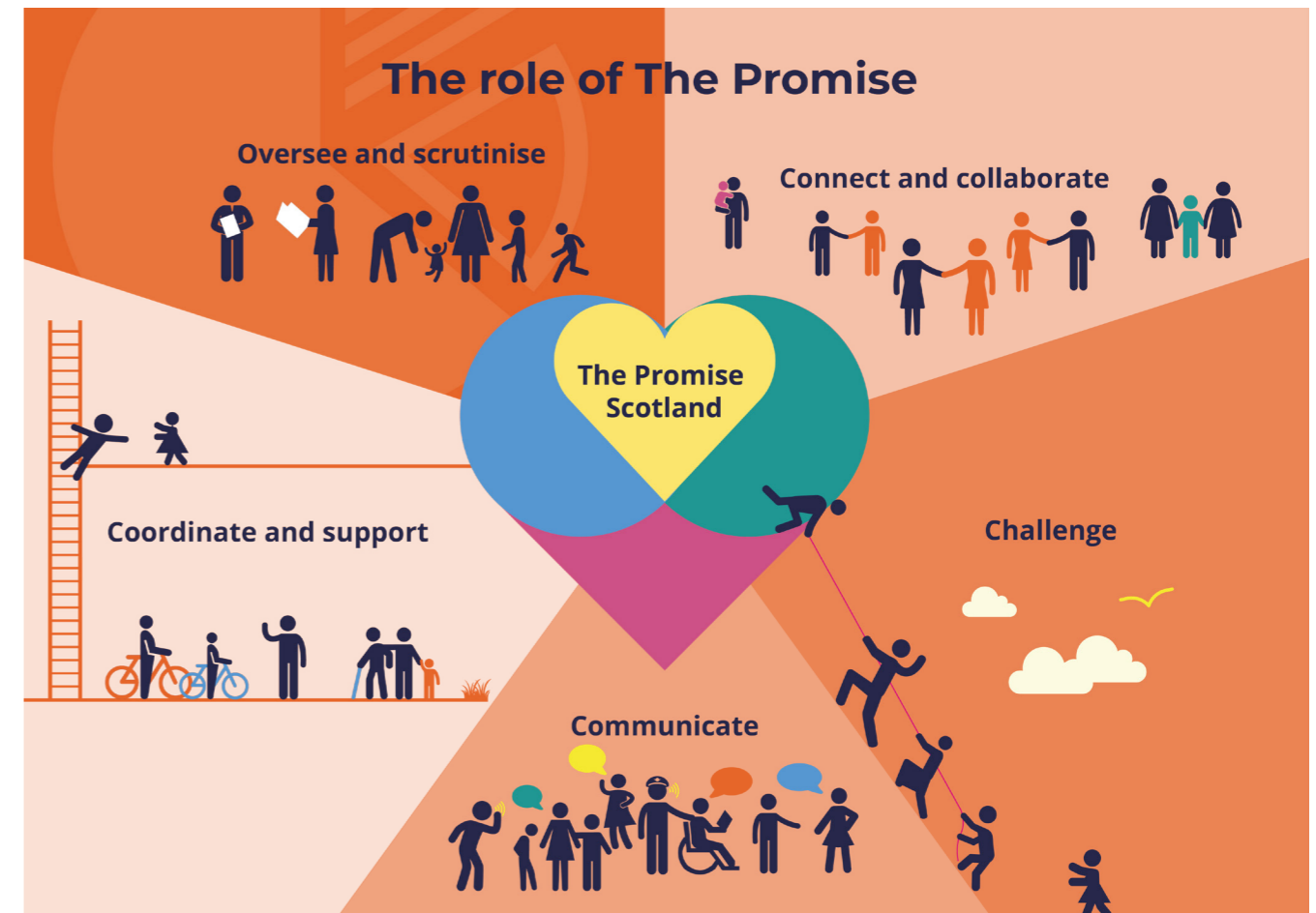
For the **Oversight Board** to do their job, they must be kept up to date with the progress Scotland is making to #KeepThePromise. This will be done via a **Measuring Change and Monitoring Progress Framework**, centred on what matters to children and families, which will bring together three main areas of change measurement:

- ▶ the work organisations across Scotland are doing, and need to do, to #KeepThePromise
- ▶ the work The Promise Scotland is doing to support organisations working on change
- ▶ the shifts in the wider context and landscapes surrounding organisational change

The **Oversight Board** will use the data and evidence collected under this framework to determine whether Scotland's pace and performance to #KeepThePromise is sufficient.

The **Measuring Change and Monitoring Progress Framework**, its underpinning methodologies and reporting lines and the targets it sets will evolve alongside the **Change Programme**. Once established, its data will be available through an online dashboard, accessible to all those who have a role or interest in tracking Scotland's progress to #KeepThePromise.

Plan 21-24: The Role of The Promise Scotland



The Promise Scotland is committed to its own obsolescence. At every stage, the organisation will ask whether what is needed could be done without it. Building a full time, constant role for another organisation is not an option. The Promise Scotland has a job to do and then it will get out of the way. This organisation will not exist beyond the implementation period.

The Promise Scotland has a dual responsibility of oversight of progress and support for delivery. To meet this dual responsibility, The Promise Scotland will:

Coordinate and support

The Promise Scotland will, through the development and publication of the successive Plans and evolving Change Programme, coordinate the work of change across Scotland, providing a route map.

The Promise Scotland will play a strong leadership role at national and local level to influence and support the development and investment of family, community and children's mental health and wellbeing services.

It will provide a support offer to all organisations, bodies and agencies working across Scotland to #KeepThePromise. Depending on what is needed, the package of support will be bespoke and wide-ranging, including service design tools, methodologies and project governance.

Oversee and scrutinise

The Promise Scotland will support the Oversight Board to scrutinise progress made across Scotland to #KeepThePromise. The Board will report annually on its progress, and provide expertise and support on what is needed to make sustainable change.

Connect and collaborate

The Promise Scotland will have close working relationships with the custodians of the 'care system'. It will work to reduce siloed working by identifying and connecting the various components and parts that must work together to #KeepThePromise.

As one of the first tasks, in 2021, The Promise Scotland will produce a policy, legislative, data and governance map of the operational landscape.

The Promise will also provide support to ensure effective collaboration between organisations with responsibility for systems and structures that impact on children's and families' lives.

Challenge

Throughout the creation of **Plan 21-24**, detailed consideration was given to the bridges and barriers to #KeepThePromise, as well as the risks. These were fully mapped so the steps required to maximise, overcome and mitigate any risk were fully understood. For example, this involved examining the 'implementation gap', including the many cracks and crevices between the respective agencies' approaches; and required an assessment of the known macro barriers; such as the fragmented policy environment and commissioning, and unknown barriers, like the impending economic impact of COVID-19. It also reflected the willingness demonstrated in the engagement, the ambition that Scotland has for its children and families, and the commitment to #KeepThe Promise.

Throughout **Plan 21-24**, The Promise Scotland will use this work, and continue to build on it, to identify precisely where the challenges lie and how to tackle them.

Communicate

The Promise Scotland will develop and deliver a communications strategy designed to inform and engage Scotland with the work of change required to #KeepThePromise. It will use a variety of media channels and tools, chosen to ensure that it is accessible to everyone in Scotland, in particular children and families.

Communications will be clear, consistent and concise. They will be delivered in an inclusive, ethical, collaborative and above all, honest way. The Promise Scotland will drive and maintain interest in its work to ensure that Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise remains a national priority.

As with the [Independent Care Review](#), the work of The Promise Scotland will be appreciative, collaborative, open, honest and accountable to children and families, whose aspirations will remain at its heart.



Find out more

Visit www.thepromise.scot

Email: hello@thepromise.scot



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