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National Care Service Consultation Responses Analysis

Implications for Keeping the Promise

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a project to consider responses to the Scottish Government consultation on the establishment of a **National Care Service (NCS)**, from the perspective of the opportunities and risks these proposals present to Scotland's commitment to **#KeepThePromise**. It follows an [interim report](#), which flagged key issues for further consideration on the Scottish Government proposal to include children's services in an NCS and the implications of this for The Promise.

This final report builds on the previous report to capture insights about the proposed NCS and children's services and how structural changes to care might impact on Scotland's commitment to keep The Promise, including the impact on current priority areas for change identified in **Plan 21-24**.

It opens up the analytic space around the question of including children's services in an NCS, which constituted a small part of the overall Government consultation, by presenting an in-depth analysis of responses directly referencing the Promise. The analysis is interwoven with findings from a series of workshops carried out with care experienced young people and professionals who support them.

The analysis suggests that organisations' and individuals' views on the proposal to include children's services in an NCS are complex and nuanced. Around half of the organisational responses analysed indicated it was not possible to say at this stage whether children's services should be included. Numerous concerns were expressed about the consultation proposal and process. Collectively, these point to an overall lack of engagement with the five fundamentals of Plan 21-24, which are to be embedded throughout all parts of the 'care system', namely: what matters to children and families, listening, poverty, children's rights and language.

Findings of the analysis suggest the proposal to include children's services in an NCS will potentially impact, in both positive and negative ways, many of the key actions across the priority areas of **Plan 21-24**.

Whole Family Support

Potential for integration or fragmentation of services for families.

A Good Childhood

Opportunities for integration of some services, risk of fragmentation of other services; importance of links between children's care, education and health services; potential for improving transitions between child and adult services; impact on child protection and statutory responsibilities; concern that children's services may become 'lost' in bigger organisations.

Supporting the Workforce

Impact of structural change on workforce who are already under considerable pressure; need for cultural change to support relationship-based practice; need for investment and recognition of workforce value.

Planning

Impact of a national service on local delivery of services to children and families; potential for improved, equitable and consistent delivery of services; role of third sector organisations; questions and tensions around commissioning and funding children's services; potential benefits for information sharing and a more integrated system.

Building Capacity

The need for structural and cultural change; potential impact of structural change, including on local partnerships; concerns about timing of change; risk that structural change derails the work toward keeping The Promise.

A strongly recurring theme was the need for more information before respondents felt able to make an informed, considered decision about whether children's services should be included in an NCS. Questions were raised in consultation responses and the workshops that require answers from Scottish Government, to enable organisations and individuals to effectively engage with the possibility of including children's services in an NCS. Here we present 12 of the key questions we identified. This list, including a longer set of related sub-questions, is provided in Section 5 of this report.

1

What actual difference would creating an NCS make in children's lives?

2

**How will an NCS function in relation to children's services?
How will it actually work?**

3

How will an NCS ensure listening to and meaningfully involving children and young people is embedded in decision-making and service development at all levels, strategic and individual?

4

How will an NCS create better integration of services and transitions between them?

5

How will an NCS make the experience of children and families more straightforward, seamless and easy to navigate?

6

How will links to services that are not included in the NCS, such as education, early years learning and childcare, and housing be protected and strengthened?

7 What are the implications for statutory responsibilities, including public and child protection and corporate parenting, which currently sit with local authorities?

8 How will an NCS enable the relationship-based practice and culture that children want and need?

9 How will an NCS allow for local innovation and flexibility in response to local needs? How will an NCS enable consistent and fair provision of services across Scotland?

10 How will an NCS ensure that children and young people's needs are seen and understood, and not lost under adults' needs or in the view from an adult lens?

11 How will an NCS support and develop its workforce?

12 How can we make sure that an NCS helps us to keep the Promise and improves outcomes for children and families?

While the findings are directly drawn out of consultation responses on Scottish Government's proposals to create an NCS, many of the questions raised and the concerns discussed in responses would be relevant for thinking about other forms of structural change around the care system. The views and insights collated in this report, therefore, provide a useful resource for future discussions in this specific and wider area.

The findings indicate that establishment of an NCS that includes children's services has a raft of implications for Scotland's commitment to keep the Promise made to children and their families. Scottish Government's proposal that children's social work and social care services be located within the NCS has the express aim to ensure a more cohesive integration of health, social work, and social care, and links the consistent delivery of services to 'vulnerable' children and families with the provision of services to adults. Responses to the proposal, from organisations who have engaged with the Promise and from workshop participants, shine a light on both opportunities and challenges that this holds for realising the Promise. These considerations have resonance beyond the immediate proposal and consultation, to broader contexts for keeping the Promise, highlighting:

- **Listening to children and young people**
- **Having all children and young people at the centre**
- **Tensions around scaffolding and planning - in relation to local and national planning, integration and fragmentation of services, allocation of funds and resources**
- **Development and support of the workforce**
- **The need for both structural and cultural change**

The analysis indicates there is not enough information to give a clear answer to the question of whether the proposed establishment of an NCS that includes children's services would help keep the Promise. Rather, considerations presented a range of perceived and potential opportunities and challenges. Collectively, these point to a need to reorient the conversation to one centred on what needs to happen to create the best services and best outcomes for children, young people and families, to ensure that the Promise is kept and that Scotland fulfils its ambition 'to be the best place in the world to grow up' so that children are 'loved, safe, and respected and realise their full potential'.

In the words of young people who participated in the workshop:

“What actual difference is it going to make? Kids don't care whether people caring for them work for Local Authorities or Government. It has to change something.”



Introduction

01

This is the final report of the findings of an analysis of selected published responses to the Scottish Government consultation on the proposed establishment of a National Care Service (NCS)¹. It follows a previously released interim report², which flagged key issues and indicated there was a need for further consideration of the issue of children's service being included in the proposed NCS.

It reports on a project which had the overall aim to capture and learn from the views of stakeholders as to the impact of the proposed NCS on Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise that every child grows up loved, safe and respected, able to realise their full potential. The Scottish Government's proposal to locate children's health and social care services within an NCS has stimulated considerable discussion and debate as to the impact this will have on children and young people. The Promise Scotland commissioned this project to capture, learn from and share the views reflected in the consultation responses about the extent to which the proposed changes will impede or improve efforts to #KeepThePromise.

The purpose of this analysis is to take a focused look at issues around the relationship between keeping The Promise and the possible creation of an NCS.

As such, the analysis has centred on published responses that made direct reference to The Promise. The interim report looked at these specifically in relation to the Scottish Government proposal to include children's services in the NCS. This final report builds on this to capture views and insights about the proposed NCS and children's services and contains important information about how structural changes to care might impact on Scotland's commitment to keep The Promise. Plan 21-24, which presents priority outcomes for the work to keep The Promise over the three years to 2024, has provided a framework for structuring the findings of the analysis, indicating where there are opportunities and challenges for The Promise to be realised in alignment with the fundamentals, priorities and actions for transformational change.

1 For more information on the consultation see A National Care Service for Scotland – Scottish Government – Citizen Space (consult.gov.scot) and for Scottish Government analysis of consultation responses see National Care Service: consultation analysis - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

2 NCS Consultation Responses Analysis: Interim report, available online: NCS Consultation Responses Analysis (thepromise.scot)

As with the interim report, the focus of the analysis has been on opening up the analytic space around children and the NCS and providing dedicated consideration of these issues. As such, other, important, issues in the consultation have been deliberately excluded from the analysis. This focus is particularly valuable with a consultation as vast and cross-cutting as the NCS consultation. It has enabled the contributions of a wide range of organisations to be amplified and made more visible. The issues considered and discussed by respondents may have been specifically produced in relation to proposals for an NCS, but they provide a valuable resource of thinking around the impact of structural change in the care system on children's and families' experiences more broadly.

The in-depth analysis of published consultation responses has been supported by engagement workshops with care experienced young people and professionals who support them. Seeking to hear the voices and perspectives of young people on matters that affect them is key to respecting their rights and ensures focus is kept on one of the foundations of The Promise that the voices of young people, and those they trust, should be at the centre of decision-making. The engagement workshops have provided the research team opportunities to 'check out' the analysis findings and also, importantly, enabled the analysis to stay grounded in the experience of care experienced children and young people and the professionals who support them.

Methodology

02

The project has two components:

- an analysis of published responses to the Scottish Government consultation on the establishment of an NCS, focused on what respondents said about whether an NCS would help Scotland to #KeepThePromise;
- and engagement workshops with care experienced young people and the professionals who support them. These elements are briefly described below; see Appendix 1 for more detail.

2.1 Analysis of published consultation responses

The aim of this project was to analyse the responses from a particular perspective – the opportunities and challenges presented by an NCS to Scotland’s commitment to keeping The Promise. This report considers only those published responses from organisations and individuals which directly reference The Promise in their response. 112 such responses were identified; 81 of these were from organisations and 31 were from individuals. This report focuses on a) the section of the consultation document which calls for a response to Scottish Government’s proposal to include children’s services in an NCS (Chapter 3a), and b) other sections in responses in which specific reference was made to The Promise. Material in the 112 responses discussing this issue was coded and then analysed to identify key themes. Details of the methods used to map, code and analyse responses are included in Appendix 1.

2.2 Engagement with care experienced young people and professionals who support them

A critical component of the project was engagement with young people and professionals. A small group of care experienced young people and a small group of professionals supporting care experienced young people were recruited through existing contacts of research team members, which include Who Cares? Scotland and the TRIUMPH network. Over the course of the project these groups met three times to explore emergent findings from the analysis, with up to six participants in each workshop. Each group met separately for a 2-hour online workshop each time. Details of the workshops and ethical considerations are included in Appendix 1.

The analysis for the report, incorporating themes from the responses and the engagement workshops, was guided by the following questions:

- **What are the key themes in the consultation responses about the proposal to include children's services in the NCS?**
- **What opportunities or challenges to progress on The Promise do the consultation responses consider an NCS will provide?**
- **How will structural change to children's services impact the priorities and actions to bring about transformational change outlined in Plan 21-24?**

Consulting on children's services and a National Care Service

03

Many responses that referenced The Promise expressed concerns about the consultation proposal and process, including that there was insufficient information about the implications for children's services to be able to engage with the consultation effectively. The concerns, which ranged from the lack of consultation with children, young people, families and those who work with and support them, to the lack of robust evidence to support such major structural change are explored in the project interim report.¹ One particular issue was that the consultation posed a specific yes/no question about whether children's services should be included in the scope of an NCS. Many of the responses that referenced The Promise responded to this question with positions that were more complex than a 'yes' or 'no' response could capture. Many respondents felt that the lack of detail in the proposals meant further information was required to engage with this question.

Overall, the concerns about the consultation reflect a lack of engagement in the consultation with the five fundamentals outlined in Plan 21-24. The five fundamentals, which are to be embedded into all parts of the 'care system' forming a solid core around which everything operates, include: what matters to children and families, listening, poverty, children's rights and language.

3.1 Should the National Care Service include children's social work and social care services?

Scottish Government asked respondents to the NCS consultation: Should the National Care Service include both adults and children's social work and social care services? The consultation document provided 'yes' or 'no' tick-box options and an open text box 'Please say why' for elaboration. While Scottish Government (February 2022) reported that a clear majority of both organisations and individuals who responded to the question agreed that it should include both adults and children's services, detailed consideration of responses from organisations and individuals who referred to The Promise offers a more nuanced analysis.

¹ See section 4.1 in the Interim Report available online: NCS Consultation Responses Analysis (thepromise.scot)

3.1.1 Organisational responses to the question of including children's services in an NCS

This issue was considered by 77 out of the 81 organisational responses that were identified as having made direct reference to The Promise. The majority of these used the questionnaire format of the consultation, but responses who engaged with this issue using a different format (for example, an email response) were also included. The remaining four responses which directly reference The Promise did not discuss whether children's services should be included in the NCS and have not been included in the analysis of responses to this question.

Just under half (37 responses) completed a tick-box 'yes' or 'no' (see Table 1). The remaining 40 responses did not complete the tick-box; rather, they provided a narrative around this issue. Our analysis found that these were roughly evenly split, with slightly more than half indicating that they found it not possible to say whether an NCS should include both adult and children's services (22 responses) and the remainder providing a 'mixed' response to the question, describing both potential benefits and risks (18 responses).

3.1.2 Individual responses to the question of including children's services in an NCS

This issue was considered by 30 out of the 31 responses from individuals that were identified as having made direct reference to The Promise, at some point in their response. One response did not discuss whether children's services should be included in the NCS and has not been included in the analysis of responses to this question. All individual responses included in the analysis used the questionnaire format of the consultation.

Most responses (26 responses) completed a tick-box 'yes' or 'no', with the majority ticking 'no' (19 responses). The remaining four responses did not complete the tick-box; two of these indicated that they found it not possible to say whether an NCS should include both adult and children's services and the remaining two providing a 'mixed' response to the question, pointing out both potential benefits and risks.

Table 1: Views on the issue of whether children's services should be included in the NCS from organisations and individuals directly referencing The Promise.

View	Organisational Responses (n=77)	Individual Responses (n=30)
Yes	18	7
No	19	19
Not possible to say	22	2
Mixed	18	2

Our focused analysis of responses that directly reference The Promise suggests, therefore, that there is no clear majority for or against including children's services in an NCS, but rather a need for further consideration of this issue, requiring more information to understand the potential outcomes for children and young people.

3.2 Engagement of the proposal with Plan 21-24 five fundamentals

Plan 21-24 outlines five fundamentals, which are to be embedded throughout all parts of the 'care system', namely: what matters to children and families, listening, poverty, children's rights and language. The concerns expressed in the responses analysed point, overall, to a lack of engagement with the fundamentals. This contributed to some respondents' perceptions, discussed further on in the report, that children's services were perceived as a secondary consideration, something of a 'bolt-on', to the core concern of adult social services.

3.2.1 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’.”
(Plan 21-24, p.14)



There was a sense of disappointment and frustration in many of the consultation responses analysed that what matters to children and families was not presented as a key focus in the proposals. While there are a few cursory references to The Promise in the NCS proposal, the vision provided by The Promise and developed with children and families is not reflected in it. Responses suggested that the proposal is not asking the right questions, with some noting that it was concerning that such an important issue was presented in a binary fashion, requiring a 'yes' or 'no' response.

Further, some of the responses have suggested that rather than asking if children's services should be included in the proposed NCS, the focus should be on what needs to happen to create the best services and best outcomes for children, young people and families in Scotland. This shift in focus would align with the commitment Scottish Government has made to #KeepThePromise that every child grows up loved, safe and respected, able to realise their full potential and keep what matters to children and families at the heart of any proposed changes.

It was reflected in some responses that the information in the consultation was "too vague" and "lacking clarity". As such, it is not clear whether what matters to children and families is at the core or not. Insufficient information and lack of detail in the consultation document about the proposal to include children's services in the NCS was noted by most responses who did not provide a 'yes' or 'no' as the reason for being unable to do so. Some responses drew attention to the fact that the proposals are underpinned by the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (IRASC), which did not consider children's social work and did not recommend inclusion of children's services in an NCS. Given the range of concerns about the proposal in its current form it is unsurprising that some responses called for a pause, to allow further consultation and review, before moving ahead with any changes.

This was echoed in the engagement workshops and put very succinctly by one young person: "How will it actually work?!" This lack of information about what the proposed inclusion of children's services in an NCS would look like and what impact it would have on their lives was considered the most important issue by the group of care experienced young people in this workshop. The absence of clear plans also left the professionals feeling very unsure about how to react to proposals, they wanted to be positive and recognised the need for change but spoke about "struggling to imagine" how an NCS would operate and how children's services would fit into this.

3.2.2 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.” (Plan 21-24, p.15)

The absence of the voices and views of children, families and those who work with and support them in the consultation process was a cause for concern expressed by over a third of the organisations. Responses noted the importance of keeping faith with the over 5,500 care experienced children, young people, parents, workers and services who made such a significant contribution to the Independent Care Review. The message conveyed was that to delay or risk delivery of The Promise could result in losing the confidence and trust of those who had contributed to the review. Both professionals and young people in workshops felt that expectations and hopes had been created across the sector around The Promise, they worried that a failure to deliver on The Promise would be damaging across services and communities.

Around half of the organisation responses analysed commented on the lack of robust evidence to support the argument that the inclusion of children’s services in the NCS would improve outcomes for children. Several responses identified local government experiences, such as Integrated Joint Boards in which children’s services had been integrated with adult services, as a potential source of evidence to consider.

3.2.3 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.” (Plan 21-24, p.17)

Given this emphasis on poverty in Plan 21-24, it is surprising to note that the consultation document does not contain a single reference to poverty, preventing inequalities or mitigating the impact of poverty on children and families. While some responses noted the opportunity that the proposed NCS offers for contributing to reducing child poverty, the lack of detail made it difficult to be sure that would be realised.

There was much discussion about poverty in the workshops with professionals.

Practitioners spoke at length about the increasing number of children living in poverty and rising cost of living throughout the UK. Professionals were critical of both the NCS proposal and The Promise for offering little detail on how social work and social care should approach issues of poverty. As one practitioner explained:

We keep hearing work [with families] should be poverty aware but The Promise and the NCS proposals said very little about this. How does this translate into practice? . . . What is the role of the NCS in addressing poverty? Is there an opportunity through the NCS to develop a new practice model which better integrates ideas from community social work? (Workshop 3)

Practitioners also felt that practice approaches that address poverty sensitively required practitioners to have more time and that current systems were too often driven by crisis.

3.2.4 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.” (Plan 21-24, p.18)

Some responses made explicit reference to children's right to participate and be heard in matters that affect them, such as this consultation, and Scotland's obligations with the incorporation of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scottish law. Across a range of organisations, responses indicated that proposing such changes to children's services without the participation of children, young people and those who work with and support them, was at odds with rights-based practice and co-design with those who are engaged with using or working in the system.

After their concerns about a lack of detail about how the NCS will actually work, participants in the young people's engagement workshops considered that the “need to make sure children and young people's voices don't get lost” was top priority in making a decision about whether to include children's services in the NCS. They noted that children's voices are often drowned out by adult voices in many social settings and worried that, in the context of the NCS, children's expressed needs might get lost amongst adult care needs and adults' ideas about what children and young people need. They noted the importance of children's voices in both the decision as to whether to include children's services in the NCS and in ongoing decisions about how those services will change and develop. This was a concern also echoed by the professionals in their workshops. Several organisational responses pointed to a serious gap with the lack of a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to inform the proposal. Scottish Government states that a CRWIA (Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment) should be used on all new legislation and policy that impacts on children, not just children's services.¹ The consultation response from the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland noted that “it is the government's obligation to do this analysis and to progress even to a consultation without one is incompatible with a human rights based approach”.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-wellbeing-impact-assessment-guidance/pages/3/>

3.2.5 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, p.19)

The conclusion, stated in The Promise, that Scotland must change the language of care, to be easily understood, positive and not create or compound stigma, was not addressed directly in the consultation document. However, the need for an agreed and unified common language and respectful non-stigmatising engagement with families was reflected in some responses.

Potential impact of including children's services in NCS on the priority areas of Plan 21-24

04

Analysis of the consultation responses that made direct reference to The Promise identified a wide range of potential opportunities and significant challenges for implementation of The Promise. Key themes that emerged initially, including those particularly related to the impact of the proposal on Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise, were discussed in the project's Interim Report. Further analysis provided an opportunity to look at these findings in greater depth, including in alignment with the priority areas for change outlined in Plan 21-24. The priority areas are essentially a translation of the conclusions of the Independent Care review, detailed in The Promise, and provide a focus for where significant and substantive changes can be made to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people and families across Scotland, including the scaffolding that surrounds their lives.

The proposed NCS, with inclusion of children's social work and social care services, is a significant structural change. It is critically important, therefore, to consider these changes with regard to the areas for change identified in Plan 21-24. This section of the report unpacks the analysis findings in relation to each of the priority areas in turn. For ease of reading and to avoid repetition, themes are generally located in one area only, but clearly there are areas of overlap, whereby themes and issues are relevant to more than one priority area.

4.1 A good childhood

Changes to children's social care and social work services, through inclusion in the proposed NCS, potentially impact on several actions within the priority area A Good Childhood in Plan 21-24. Responses highlighted, in particular, the potential impact on areas of support and moving on, with a few responses also mentioning advocacy. These are described in Plan 21-24:

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.

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.

Moving on

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

A Good Childhood, Plan 21-24, emphasises the need for intensive, integrated support from services which are focused on children and young people's needs. It was evident in the responses, that inclusion of children's services in the NCS could potentially lead to better integration of services. This was considered in terms of both 'horizontal' integration of services, to enable children, young people and families access to a range of services simultaneously as needed, and 'vertical' integration of services accessed at different life stages.

“Our discussions with Children in Scotland members did highlight some of the potentially positive aspects of aligning adult, children and justice social work and social care services. Many felt it could create a more coherent system and support services to move away from siloed working. We also believe a NCS could have benefits for young people moving from children’s services to adults’ services, allowing them to navigate the system more easily and for services to manage risk more effectively. In particular, this could be beneficial for children involved in the justice system and children with disabilities.” (Children in Scotland)

4.1.1 Opportunities and challenges for horizontal integration with other services

Many responses pointed to the potential of an NCS to provide better integration of services for children, with a few suggesting that the NCS provides potential for a universal (or more unified) service approach, which would help alleviate the stigma of asking for help. Responses pointed to the importance of services working well together, providing examples of where that was currently happening, as well as highlighting areas in which coordination between services was particularly important or could be improved.

There was also considerable concern about the risk of fragmentation of services, through inclusion of children’s services in an NCS and separation from other services. Children’s lives are not siloed and responses from some organisations, particularly those that engage with children and young people who need support across multiple services, highlighted the risks of separating out children’s care services. In particular, responses focused on education and health services, which aligns with the actions highlighted in Plan 21-24 A Good Childhood for meeting education and health needs of children ‘in care’.

Consistency of services was also a priority theme for young people who took part in the workshops. They liked the idea that the NCS had the potential to “bring everything together” and stop fragmentation. Professionals in the workshops spoke about Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the National Practice Model in Scotland, and discussed how this had helped to ensure better interagency work. Although they highlighted differences across Scotland around the effectiveness of interagency working, they wondered how an NCS would impact on the gains made in joint working across social work and education. They highlighted how all services were under increased pressure since the pandemic, which had made interagency working more challenging, and they worried that introducing the NCS would put further pressure on services, which could make collaboration less effective.

Importance of relationships between children's services and education

Highlighting an important difference between children's care services and adult care services, responses across all the stakeholder groups emphasised the key importance of children's services working together with education. Most responses indicated that it is critically important for children's services to maintain close links with education, with some arguing that to do so children's services were best kept outwith an NCS and retained locally. The importance of these links was seen primarily in relation to children's wellbeing and child protection, including the early intervention and prevention work that takes place, as well as the whole system approach currently underway to close the poverty related attainment gap. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists argued that education is the most proximal service to children and considered "there is significant risk in not involving all our partners and taking into account the partnership needed between health, care and education which could lead to the system becoming even more complicated rather than more joined up".

***"The separation of children and family's services from education will have an impact on ongoing work to close the poverty related attainment gap. Currently there is increasing acknowledgement that closing the attainment gap is not just the role for teachers and those working in education. There is a need for a whole system, multidisciplinary approach which is embedded in GIRFEC and strongly outcomes based and Local Authorities are working to that end."* (COSLA)**

***"Members also noted that a primary alignment for all children is with education services, and that inclusion in a NCS would, in bringing services together with health and other social services, change the relationship with education services which forms a substantial part of the universal provision for children."* (Social Work Scotland)**

Professionals and young people in the workshops highlighted the pivotal role of education for outcomes. Professionals, in particular, worried about how the NCS would interface with education.

Links between children's care, education and health services

Responses from some local authorities and third sector organisations provided examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of current arrangements, for children's social work services and education working together.

“We work in over 400 schools across Scotland, and we consider that education is the key universal service for children and young people. Structurally separating social work and social care from schools runs a risk of undermining the huge amount of partnership activity which takes place across local authority departments to jointly address the needs of children and young people... In the creation of a NCS which disbands Integrated Joint Boards and replaces them with Community Health and Social Care Boards which are separate entities from the local authority, what measures will be put in place to guarantee continued partnership working within education?” (Barnardo's Scotland)

The importance of children's services working closely together was noted with particular regard to children with disabilities. Some responses highlighted the importance of links between children's social services and education, others also drew health services into the equation.

“Children with disabilities are supported in our local schools. It would be hard to determine that moving health and children's social work together whilst education remains with local authorities, would result in improved experiences and outcomes. Most planning for children with disabilities takes place within education and the role of special schools should not be underestimated... Aberdeen City co-locates health, children's social work and education within our special school. This co-location enables positive relationships and shared improvement planning. It also provides for the shared delivery of services beyond the school day through the provision of services for children over school holiday periods in recognition that this is a time of high stress for families. This wider 'family support' is delivered by services pooling resource and expertise to meet the needs of families. This is possible due to the strength of relationships on the ground.” (Aberdeen City Council)

Many responses referred to the statement in the consultation document concerning the “need to retain and strengthen the existing links with Education and Early Learning and Childcare” (p.55) and, whilst in agreement with the principle, questioned how this might be enacted. Given the concerns noted above and the emphasis placed on the important role of all children’s services, including education and health, it is perhaps unsurprising that many responses identified the issue of how services would align as a key area in which further information is needed.

“Clarity is particularly needed on how services delivered via the National Care Service would interact with other policy domains and funding models that have an impact on children’s lives, in particular social security and education – the latter of which is currently delegated to local authorities ... Clarity is needed on the interactions between the National Care Service, the NHS, and education services, with an agreed and unified common language.” (The Health and Social Care Alliance)

“This question, when discussed with members, prompted more questions than answers. For example, what is meant by ‘alignment’? Is this about shared languages, approaches and professional relationships, or is it about the geographical boundaries of services, or lines of accountability? Or all of them? (Social Work Scotland)

There were a few specific areas of service provision within health and education that raised particular questions about integration in some organisational responses.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Responses across all stakeholder groups highlighted the need for improved access to mental health services for children and young people. Concerns were also raised about the current quality of CAMHS services and the transition between child and adult mental health services. Organisations questioned how the NCS would address these issues without significant additional investment.

“Improved access to mental health services would be welcomed, including for children and young people and with a focus on providing appropriate support before issues around mental health reach crisis point... There should be clearer and quicker pathways from third sector mental health services and specialist NHS services. Referral processes should be simple and easy to access.” (Edinburgh Young Carers)

Both professionals and young people in workshops saw mental health support as crucial and were concerned about the same issues of access, capacity, quality and transitions. They wanted to be positive about the potential for better CAMHS services under the NCS, but felt proposals had not addressed how the NCS would deal with these issues.

Early years services – Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

There was a strong response, particularly from public bodies and third sector organisations, to the absence of early years services and provisions in the NCS proposal, other than the somewhat vague call to “retain and strengthen the existing links”. Respondents called for clarification on where early years learning and childcare would be located and pointed to the strong interconnections between social services, health, education and early years services. A specific example of prospective tension, noted by several local authorities, was that the ‘Named Person’ sits within education for most school-aged children and in health for most pre-school children.

“It is also unclear why early years services have not been included within the proposal. As a provider of early years services we know that for many vulnerable and disadvantaged children the challenges they face often begin during the earliest stages of their development, creating problems that can endure throughout childhood and into adulthood. Therefore, if the NCS is to include children’s services we believe there must also be consideration of where early years services fit – especially for those children and young people with the most challenging starts in life.” (Aberlour Child Care Trust)

There was a general view from the professionals' workshops that early intervention, particularly related to early years services, had been side lined in recent years due to austerity and then the pandemic. Practitioners felt that in order to deliver on The Promise the NCS would need a robust and locally sensitive approach to early intervention involving key universal services such as education.

Responses from local authorities were firmly opposed to including children's services with adult social care services. Some of these responses, for example that of the Aberdeen City Council and Community Planning Aberdeen, explicitly drew on experiences of previous restructuring, with the establishment of Integrated Joint Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships. This saw the separation and fragmentation of adult and children's social work services, and subsequent recalibration. Respondents suggested that the proposed changes will see further fragmentation of the existing important partnerships and service relationships.

“This endless creation of different fracture lines is increasingly and unnecessarily making local delivery more complex and undermining initiatives to address fractures within existing structures.” (Aberdeen City Council & Community Planning Aberdeen)

Concern that children's social work services may be subsumed within health services

Concern was expressed in some organisational responses across the stakeholder groups that children's social work could be subsumed within health services, which operate under a different model. This was seen as being potentially detrimental to meeting the needs of children and families. The Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities, for example, noted “concerns expressed by people with learning disabilities that health becomes the ‘senior partner’ in this service” and that a medical model that perceives someone's impairment as the cause of their disadvantage, would dominate over the social model of disability, where the cause of disadvantage is found in the barriers society creates for disabled people.

“Many of the risks associated have been noted about as we consider the impact on particular groups who may receive children’s services social work support. This includes children’s services becoming subsumed in a health/medical model which does not meet the needs nor profile of the vulnerable families we support.” (Aberdeenshire Integrated Joint Board; Association of Directors of Education)

“There are also significant risks that Children’s Services Social Work would be subsumed within health services who work within a very different model. Children’s Services Social Work is a very particular field of social work with clear statutory duties and responsibilities and whilst families may experience multiple challenges and require multiple services, the approach is often different and does rely on eligibility criteria or capacity to accept support in certain circumstances. A centralised approach brings the risk of the values and identity of the profession becoming lost or the service being seen as the poor relation and underfunded.” (Association of Directors of Education)

Potential impact on child protection and statutory responsibilities

Many responses expressed concern about the impact the proposed changes would have on child protection. One concern was that educational professionals play a key role in early identification of risk and potential harm. Effective joint working was seen as crucial to child protection and safeguarding and, as noted in earlier sections, there were concerns about the impact the NCS could have on these working relationships.

“If children’s social work was to be included in the NCS - but school and children’s health not to follow suit - then the informal and formal relationships which have been developed over years may suffer, thus posing a challenge to child protection, communication and partnership working.” (Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice)

Another concern, expressed particularly but not solely by local authorities, was around the statutory responsibilities which sit with local authorities and the implications of moving children's services into an NCS both in the future and during any transition period. The statutory role of Chief Social Work Officers in particular was highlighted, with the lack of information and clarity around where this role would sit and how it would function being a source of concern.

“COSLA is particularly concerned that the consultation makes no mention of the statutory responsibilities on public bodies for both public and child protection, nor corporate parenting. These statutory duties are currently the responsibility of Local Authorities. Should education, and other universal services, remain within Local Authorities and children's services placed within a National Care Service there could be significant implications and unintended consequences for the safety and welfare of children where vital services, and statutory responsibilities, sit across two separate organisations.” (COSLA)

Beyond the importance of governance structures and statutory responsibilities, many responses also highlighted the importance of professional standards and accountability.

[In the NCS proposals there is] “A failure to properly address the issue of professional standards and accountability, with no reference to the role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). If responsibility and accountability for Adult Social Care (and, for that matter, children services and social work and professional practice) is to be transferred to Scottish Government ministers, how will the professional standards and the statutory function fulfilled by the CSWO be managed under this new structure?” (Scottish Borders Council)

This also linked to the issue of training and staff development around child protection under the NCS. Regardless of where services are located following any structural changes, Police Scotland consider it:

“ . . . imperative that robust triaging processes are embedded into the proposed NCS to ensure that child protection concerns are easily identified... Training and guidance will be required to ensure that all employees under the umbrella of a NCS would be able to recognise flags associated with child protection concerns or risks. Roles and responsibilities should be defined to support and empower practitioners to make the correct choices and decisions.” (Police Scotland)

The importance of joining up the tiers of service to support better practice in child protection and safeguarding was seen as crucial.

“Supporting the children’s and adult’s workforce (social work and non-social work) is critical to developing our capacity and responsiveness to trauma. It promotes early and proportional support at all stages of intervention. There is no evidence to suggest that moving some of the system (adult services, potentially children’s social work, and health) together will in a structural reorganisation deliver the aspirations set out in the consultation or The Promise. Tier 1 support (primary prevention) will still be delivered by the universal service of education. There needs to be strong alignment between all tiers of intervention. Tier 1 supports are considerable in terms of resource. A perceived spilt in ownership and responsibilities, or a failure for these to align with Early Intervention (Tier 2) and Specialist (Tier 3) levels, would be detrimental.” (Community Planning Aberdeen)

Service areas not addressed in the proposal

Alongside the need for more information and clarification from Scottish government on certain issues, specific areas were identified in responses as being absent from the proposal. These included particular groups of children, young people and families, such as, marginalised groups, children and families experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence, young carers, young peoples who have been in prison or whose family members are in prison, as well as areas in which support is provided, including youth work, out of school care, pre- and post-natal support, and housing.

“Our members identified a number of other key omissions in the National Care Service consultation. Members were surprised that the role of poverty is not mentioned in the consultation document. Key learning and care environments such as youth work and out of school care are also not covered. Members also noted that there is limited mention of children and families experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence.”
(Children in Scotland)

“The following groups and situations were additionally noted by CHS volunteers, board and staff as being places where people may currently miss out on services and would need to be addressed by a NCS.

- ***Those who need more advocacy or are less aware of their rights, e.g. young people leaving care***
- ***Very vulnerable children can get lost when they are moved around the country, or between countries e.g. unaccompanied children***
- ***Young carers can face very significant challenges***
- ***Those whose family could benefit from community supports and universal services that might not come under the NCS directly***
- ***Young people whose family members are in prison or have been in prison***
- ***Pre and post-natal support for parents”***

(Children’s Hearings Scotland)

4.1.2 Opportunities and challenges for ‘vertical’ integration of services

Potential for improving transition from child to adult services if children’s services are included in the NCS

More cohesive services with improved transitions is one of the Scottish Government’s expressed reasons for including children’s services in the NCS. This is also identified as an action in Plan 21-24, that “each young care experienced adult will experience their transition as consistent, caring, integrated and focussed on their needs, not on ‘age of services’ criteria” (p.24). Multiple organisations working with children and young people commented on the opportunity the proposal might provide for improving the transition from child to adult services. Some organisations reported poor experiences of members of their communities moving between child and adult services, with young people “falling through the cracks”.

Professionals and young people in the workshops also felt that easing the transitions between child and adult services could be a benefit of the NCS. Ensuring stability and continuity in relationships was seen as an important part of The Promise and not consistently enabled under current arrangements and supports. Young people hoped that including children’s services in the NCS might reduce waiting lists and waiting times, particularly when moving between child and adult services. Professionals wondered, however, if a change in structure without additional investment would be sufficient to deliver on this aspiration.

Further, some responses noted that while improving transitions is important, the proposal considers only some service transitions and either ignores, or would not necessarily be helpful in, other areas. Responses from local authorities suggested that moving children’s services from where these are currently located, to prioritise joined up child and adult social care services, will potentially hinder transitions for young people, by disconnecting them from other important services. Housing, for example, is an area raised in some responses and emphasised as an action in Plan 21-24, which states that housing pathways for care-experienced young people will include a range of affordable options that are specifically tailored to their needs and preferences, and youth homelessness will be eradicated. Reflecting previous sections, several responses noted the vital role that education services play in transitions and the importance of educational transitions. The importance of listening to young people and ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making is also expressed in some responses.

“Improving transitions between children and adult services is essential, but this proposal fails to recognise that it is only small number of children who transition from children’s social work to adult social work / social care services. The critical universal services that support effective transitions for the vast majority of young people are education and housing and community-based services. The Feeley report and this consultation makes minimal reference to needing to consider how relationships with education and housing will be sustained. This is just as relevant for children with disabilities.” (East Lothian Council)

“Good transitions are important for autistic children moving into adult support services or into further education or employment. Families tell us that when their child leaves school it is like falling off a cliff. It should not be a surprise that children grow up and leave school. Eleventh hour or no advance planning is common and unnecessary so the inclusion of both, working in a collaborative and connected way is vital.” (Scottish Autism)

Potential for better integration of services supporting different age groups

Responses from some third sector organisations primarily focused on children and young people considered that there was potential for better integration of services supporting different age groups. This was seen as potentially helpful for improving information sharing between services for children and adults, reduction in delays (for example, in the current Children’s Hearings System), working more seamlessly to meet the needs of parents and effectively support individuals and families (with less being ‘passed around’ by services), more consistent and effective support, an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across adult and children services, and scope for greater consistency relating to policies and service delivery. However, the lack of information and detail in the proposal made it challenging for organisations to see how it would work in practice.

“Whilst the ambition of cradle-to-grave ethos is recognised, there are concerns about how the inclusion of both adult and children’s services would work in practice.” (Aberdeenshire Council & Aberdeenshire Integrated Joint Board)

“We believe there are potential benefits to integrating delivery for people across the life course but lack of clarity about alignment to existing and ongoing strategies makes this difficult to assess.” (Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans)

Young people in the engagement workshop expressed similar ambivalence, saying that integration across services for children and adult members of their families could be positive, but that it might not work in practice. A concern expressed was that support would only go to adults, with services assuming that adults would then support children, although this assumption was not always accurate in young people’s experience.

4.1.3 Implications for children’s services in relation to adult services

Responses recognised the connectedness between adult and children’s services, and the opportunity to strengthen collaboration across these. But many also pointed to the very different needs of each group and, particularly, the distinct needs of children and young people, which differ significantly from those of adults.

“... a key justification of the proposal to include children’s services appears to be the acknowledgment that child and adult services are inextricably linked and that separating the governance of the two would be difficult. Whilst we welcome this recognition and agree that adult and children’s services are linked, the needs of adults who receive social care and children who receive social care are very different and often require different responses and resources.” (Barnardo’s Scotland)

Risk of children's services being 'lost' in bigger organisation

The risk that children's services would be 'lost' in a large organisation which has a predominantly adult focus was a concern expressed in many responses, across all stakeholder groups. Some responses indicated that this was particularly worrying for groups of children who are more marginalised by current systems and whose voices are less likely to be heard.

“The main risk of locating children's social work and social care in the National Care Service is that they will become a very small component of a large complex organisation which has a predominantly adult focus.”
(Northern Alliance)

“This particular concern has been discussed by ALLIANCE members as an issue of power; close attention must be paid to whose voice is most likely to be heard and prioritised if children's services are included in the National Care Service, particularly in the case of disabled children and young people, children and young people living with long term conditions, children in care, and young carers. As stated in The Promise, “Scotland must make particular effort to understand and act upon quieter voices, including infants and nonverbal children and those with learning disabilities.””
(The Health and Social Care Alliance)

Some responses also highlighted the importance of retaining specialist services for young people.

“No problem with the umbrella term NCS but it is essential that the specialisms are protected in order to provide the best service for the service user.”
(Advocacy Western Isles)

Both young people and professionals in the workshops highlighted the need for more specialist child and youth services, not less. Young people wondered if children's services expertise would be lost in a larger service primarily aimed at adults. They felt that because of their stage of development, children and young people often need different things to adults and they need workers who are sensitive to what it is like to be a child or a young person. Professionals wondered what would happen to helpful specialisms around family support, youth justice, and child protection if children's services became part of the NCS. They highlighted the findings of research and child death inquiries which recommend staff gaining more specialist knowledge of children and their needs, not less.

Concern that children's needs will be secondary to adult services needs

The differences between what adults and children need in terms of social care, and the approaches taken to meeting those needs, were noted in some responses. Some responses suggested that the proposal to include children's services seemed secondary to the main proposal focused on adult social care. This was described by UNISON Scotland as "feeling rushed and a slightly opportunistic "bolt-on" to the core IRASC project". There was a concern, which permeated some of the responses, that the approach being taken to the inclusion of children's services in an NCS suggested the 'secondary' place these would have if included.

"Consideration of Children's Services within the consultation feels secondary in importance. We are concerned that this relegation could be replicated in a NCS that includes children's services." (Scottish Children's Reporter Administration)

"Another concern that has been observed within the system is that when SLT children's services are integrated with adult services, they can become overshadowed by adult agendas. The power and decision making seems to be firmly rooted in adult services and therefore, if this shift does occur our suggestion is that measures are put in place to counteract this risk. We need to ensure that prevention and early intervention is at the heart of the services we provide for the population." (The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists)

Young people and professionals in workshops also highlighted the expertise of those working with children and young people and the importance of these skills and differentiated approaches being further developed, not lost.

The pressure of an ageing population competing for resources

Organisational responses pointed to Scotland having an ageing population, which will increase demand for adult social care services over time. Concerns were raised that, at the same time, children's services would be trying to meet a different type of demand to specialise and shift emphasis to prevention in order to keep The Promise.

“The Promise has proposed a ten-year change programme with the vision for a care sector for children and families that will ‘shrink and specialise’ with an emphasis on prevention. In contrast, demand for adult social care is likely to continue to grow as the population ages. We would welcome further detail on how the National Care Service will balance the distinct needs and rights of babies, children and families, in a context of growing demand for adult social care.” (NSPCC Scotland)

4.2 Whole family support

Themes relevant to whole family support were identified in many consultation responses, with particular emphasis on how this plays out in practice. There is considerable overlap with themes related to actions toward A Good Childhood, discussed in the previous section. The interconnections were highlighted in many responses, such as that of Social Work Scotland, which pointed to family support, early intervention and child protection being inextricably linked, as well as the UNCRC articles which provide for protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence being inextricably linked with those that relate to participation, family and parental support, recovery and best interests. Some responses also strongly pointed to the actions, identified in Plan 21-24, of family support, which draw on the 10 principles discussed in The Promise, and integration of services to enact this.

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
Flexible

Community based
Responsive and timely
Work with family assets
Empowerment and agency
Underpinned by children's rights

Service integration

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

A theme highlighted in responses from organisations that engage with children, young people and families was the potential that the proposed inclusion of children's services in an NCS could have for holistic family support. Some responses explicitly linked this with conclusions from the Independent Care Review and the call in The Promise for provision of whole family support.

“Seventy two percent of those who responded to our National Care Service survey felt a National Care Service would offer them easier access to support services for their family.” (Adoption UK Scotland)

“This anomaly [parents with learning disabilities being ineligible for adult or children’s services] was recognised by the Independent Care Review. In its final report *The Promise*, it called for the systematic provision of universal family support services that are capacity-building, holistic and non-stigmatising. Having children’s and adult services sitting within the same service is an important step to delivering this provision. SCLD recommends that the NCS becomes the mechanism for the provision of universal family support services.” (Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities)

4.2.1 Potential for integration or fragmentation of services for families

Responses indicated that a positive outcome of the proposed changes could be better enabling of whole family support approaches. This could ensure, for example, that parents with mental health or substance misuse needs had better access to the supports. Responses, from third sector organisations in particular, highlighted the importance of a holistic, integrated and coordinated approach to meeting the needs of families, with greater alignment of support across government departments, organisations and service providers. Within this, the need to listen to and to work alongside families was also emphasised, as was the need for support to be available to families earlier.

“It is important to state that adults who use social care may also be parents or carers of children who would have use for services delivered as part of the National Care Service. A new approach which views the whole family through a holistic perspective offers the chance of improvement in outcomes for children and their families and demands a highly coordinated response. However, it is important that engagement with families happens on a relational basis which is respectful, non-stigmatising and non-judgemental and doesn’t fall back into transactional interactions which are “done to” the family...We would like to highlight the 10 principles of intensive family support as laid out in *The Promise*.” (Children 1st)

However, while responses noted that the inclusion of children's services in an NCS has the potential for better integration of services, holistic family support, and improved transitions, there was also an understanding that this is not necessarily how it will play out in practice. As with other areas, respondents noted the need for more information about how family services and support would operate within an NCS. The lack of detail contributed to some responses acknowledging the intention and aspirations, and in some cases aligning this with the aims of The Promise or GIRFEC, but not fully embracing the proposal, despite the potential benefits. There was still a concern that children's services could be left managing the whole family without this support from specialist services if the NCS was used as a cost saving exercise. Other responses expressed reservations about whether an NCS was the best way to achieve support for families.

“Family support and the development of preventative support are integral to keeping children safe and at home with those they love and who love them. Family support is integral to the protection of children’s wellbeing in a holistic whole systems/family support, whilst the transition from phases of high risk/complexity/intensive and potentially compulsory intervention in child protection assessment, planning and support to positions of improved safety and choice. If national reforms allows for a greater focus to and resource for preventative early family support, this would be welcomed however the consultation does not profile how this might be supported and resourced.” (East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Integrated Joint Board)

Responses also pointed to the complexity of the landscape, including both the issues facing children, young people and families, and the range of services providing support and care for them. There was a sense from some that this complexity was not fully acknowledged or addressed in the proposed changes.

“Children’s interactions with care, in its broadest sense are complex – including statutory social work services which work to protect the most vulnerable children in our society; social care for disabled children (including respite care); support for care experienced children and young people; family support; and young carers’ support... This is delivered by statutory agencies and by the third sector. Many children receive support through multiple services and like their lives, the services that support them are complex and varied... It is the enormous challenge of understanding this complex range of services and support that gives us concern at the proposed timescales for implementation of the National Care Service. The boundaries between health and care are not clear in the current proposals.” (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland)

“The creation of a new body does not automatically lead to less complexity, there would still be a need to deal between different departments and so much depends on how the new service is structured and this is currently unknown.” (The Highland Council)

“Many children affected by disability or with family members in need of support have very complex and challenging needs. Many are impacted by poverty, addiction, mental health problems, criminal justice. What will make a difference is better alignment of the support around a child/family – including the benefits system.” (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)

4.3 Supporting the workforce

Plan 21-24 emphasises the importance of supporting people who care for children, as well as ensuring consistency of approach, values and understanding across Scotland's workforce.

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.

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.

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.

4.3.1 Potential impact of structural change on workforce

Responses addressed some of the risks that might be associated with structural change. Local government, in particular, included the risk that focusing attention on restructuring may lead to uncertainty for staff. This uncertainty was also posited as being a risk in and of itself in protective services.

“Structural change provokes uncertainty for staff which is a risk in protective services. The degree of change – legislation, strategy and policy that children and families social work is having to embrace is already very significant.” (East Lothian Council)

The impact of change on the workforce was also considered in the context of the unsettling circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic over recent years.

“Another consideration is the impact of change on both staff and those in receipt of services. Change is always unsettling and the justification for undertaking change must be really clear before embarking on it, particularly after the difficult 18 months experienced by staff and service users.” (Aberdeen City Integrated Joint Board)

“Our members also highlighted that many public and third sectors workers are experiencing staff burnout as a result of the pandemic. Organisations are also struggling with staff recruitment and retainment issues. It has been questioned whether this is the best time to be introducing new processes, structures and systems for workers to navigate.” (Children in Scotland)

This was further articulated in the engagement workshop with professionals working with care experienced children and young people. There was a clear shared view of a workforce that is currently “running on empty”, with “nothing left in the tank”. Participants felt that the workforce had been under huge stress and under resourced even prior to the pandemic and the situation had only gotten worse.

Some responses suggested looking to experiences of local authorities and Integration Joint Boards, comparing outcomes where children’s social work and health services have and have not been integrated, to provide information and evidence about the impact of such changes on the workforce.

“For example, in 2015 North Lanarkshire Council integrated Children, Families and Justice Services under the auspices of the Chief Accountable Officer of the Health and Social Care Partnership with a requirement to review the scheme in five years. Three years later, based on having a fully organisational spanning service, Children, Families and Justice Services were aligned with education.

Potential lessons learned from this review include:

- ***Impact on professional relationships when terms and conditions of colleagues differ (Health and Social Work);***
- ***Greater need for promotion of Social Work identity given small numbers of Social Work staff in comparison to health;***
- ***Supervisory relationships possibly not meeting needs of Social Work staff if managed by health professional (and vice versa);***
- ***Workforce and organisational development to support changes.”***

(Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice)

4.3.2 Importance of valuing the workforce

Some responses explicitly supported the proposal for fair work practices included in the NCS proposal, articulating the importance of valuing the workforce, ensuring fair pay and good working conditions that include support, training and development. In many responses the importance of valuing the workforce was inextricably linked to issues of increased and fairly allocated funding and resources.

“From our work, we know that relationships with professionals are of key importance to children and families who are engaging with children’s social work and social care services... We must ensure that the social care workforce is valued for the important work its members undertake, and that fair pay and good working conditions are central to future development of the sector, whether through NCS or other mechanisms. The workforce must have access to appropriate training and development opportunities to support them to deliver high-quality outcomes.” (Children in Scotland)

“NES suggests that it will be important to achieve parity of esteem between those employed within children’s services, justice services, social care and health through investment in Fair Work principles, education and training, workforce development, wellbeing and professional regulation.” (NHS Education for Scotland)

In the workshop with professionals there was much discussion about the need to properly support the workforce. Professionals spoke with concern about the high turnover of social workers, high vacancy levels in social work and social care, and the closure of crucial early intervention services in some areas. They crystallised these points into two key questions they would want to pose about the NCS and the workforce:

“How would the NCS re-build services stripped away under austerity and depleted during the pandemic? How will the NCS improve the working conditions of social work and ensure that people stay in the profession?” (Workshop 3)

4.3.3 Cultural change to support relationships between staff and children and young people

Many responses pointed to a greater need for cultural change than structural change. In doing so, responses highlighted the importance of caring for those who care for children, supporting relationships between those caring and the children and young people they are caring for, and person-centred practice.

“The Promise aims to prevent children being taken into care and accommodated outwith their family home. It also seeks to ensure that the care experience better meets children’s needs for child centred care that listens to the voice of the young person and provides them with loving and continuing relationships. Work is ongoing in LAs to implement this. Any structural change arising from the NCS has the potential to derail this work.” (UNISON Scotland)

“Care and support services should be holistic and person-centred in approach. The benefit of longer-term support, and the impact this can have in preventing crisis, should be acknowledged and factored in where appropriate.” (Edinburgh Young Carers)

The workshops with young people and professions also highlighted the issue of culture, with participants emphasising the importance of delivering on The Promise focus around ‘people’ and ‘relationships’. Both groups asked questions about how incorporation into the NCS would better enable the kind of relationship-based practice that children and young people have said they want and need. Professionals were clear that support and high-quality training were important but saw unmanageable workloads as key barriers to changes in culture and practice. Without greater investment in services, it was unclear to professionals how incorporation into the NCS would allow children’s services to move towards the early help and whole family intervention approach which is promoted in The Promise.

Professionals and young people both spoke about the immense pressure local authorities were under. They wondered if the NCS could help reduce some of this pressure and make more time for practitioners to build relationships and respond in creative ways to families in distress. As one practitioner explained:

“People navigate the system through relationships. How will the NCS make the system less complex and more responsive?” (Workshop 3)

Impact on the workforce of different cultures and values between health and social care services

Some responses pointed to the importance of joined up services and potential benefits of integrated care and health services, but also noted the challenges inherent in this for those working in the ‘care system’. Some drew on the experiences of implementation of GIRFEC to outline challenges such as overcoming different cultures, language, practices, priorities and values.

“If an integrated structure is matched with a corresponding integration of cultures, and the establishment of a new public service ethos, bringing health and care into a new organisational ‘family’, then we consider that alignment should be possible. Nevertheless, the Care Inspectorate considers this would be a significant challenge. Health and social work services often demonstrate different value bases and priorities. Sometimes the complex needs of children and young people who have experienced trauma could be better understood or considered by other services as part of a holistic approach.” (Care Inspectorate)

“Furthermore, clarity on the interactions between the National Care Service, NHS and education is needed, particularly the latter which is currently under the remit of local authorities. We know that the introduction of a unified, common language to communicate across children’s social services, such as GIRFEC, can reduce complexity if implemented adequately across sectors. Members have expressed that, because GIRFEC already provides a unified language and approach, a structural change may not be the solution to address current systemic issues. As such, a proper scoping of the gaps that currently exist in this approach is also needed to understand how the introduction of a GIRFE approach with the National Care Service would work effectively in practice.” (The Health and Social Care Alliance)

Practitioner workshops also highlighted the challenges around culture change. They discussed how important culture change was for the implementation of The Promise and how it was still early days in terms of the work of The Promise in some organisations. As one Senior Practitioner and Promise Lead explained:

“The Promise is far from a done deal. You need to take people along with you and everyone needs to feel ownership for change.” (Workshop 3)

Alongside the concerns, outlined previously, about children’s social work being subsumed in health, associated risks were identified regarding a potential loss of professional values and identity for those working in children’s services. Related to these concerns, some organisational responses flagged the importance of training to ensure that the workforce across the NCS have the skills to identify and respond to child protection concerns. This is in addition to ensuring that specialist skills and roles are retained.

“Training and guidance will be required to ensure that all employees under the umbrella of a NCS would be able to recognise flags associated with child protection concerns or risks. Roles and responsibilities should be defined to support and empower practitioners to make the correct choices and decisions.” (Police Scotland)

4.4 Planning

While recognising that children and families use local services, Plan 21-24 highlights the importance of those services not being determined simply by which community they live in. Rather the action to be taken is to ensure that all children and families get the services and support they need, regardless of where they live. This is a key argument, in Plan 21-24 and in the Scottish Government NCS consultation, for national coordination of planning and investment.

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.

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.

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.

4.4.1 Impact of a National Care Service on local delivery of services to children and families

Around half of the responses analysed commented on the impact that including children's services in an NCS would have on local services, identifying advantages and disadvantages.

“The emphasis on establishing national standards that ensure consistency, fairness and equality of access, while also allowing the commissioning of services at a local level that are flexible and responsive to local need, is welcome. Striking the balance between these two priorities will be key.” (Edinburgh Young Carers)

Potential for improved and equitable access to services

Responses from all stakeholder groups indicated the importance of access to services. There was the suggestion from some public and third sector organisations that inclusion of children and adult services in an NCS could contribute to more 'joined up' services, with clearer pathways and greater accessibility. Alongside this, some responses also emphasised human rights in ensuring equal access to services for all.

“Perspectives from our service user group included that “service user choice may be enhanced, the pathway of support will be more consistent and accessible, and that points of access will be much clearer and there will be better relationships with service providers”.” (Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership)

“The National Care Service must ensure that children and young people have equitable access to services.” (The Health and Social Care Alliance)

Ensure consistent delivery of services to the most vulnerable children and families across Scotland

Many responses had concerns about the consistency of current delivery of services across Scotland. The potential of an NCS to improve consistency was therefore identified, although many were not always convinced that an NCS would achieve the desired consistency. Organisations raised concerns about variation in the delivery of services and questioned assumptions made about the 'success' of existing policies given such inconsistency.

“Forty seven percent of those who responded to our survey on the National Care Service proposals said they had not received the support services they needed. Specifically, they reported ‘falling through the cracks’ between two different local authority areas and different social workers, a lack of appropriate support services in their area, long waiting lists, and a lack of understanding and professional knowledge within the system. What is needed is a system that can address the fragmented nature of support and ensure consistency of provision across geographic areas.” (Adoption UK Scotland)

A key benefit posited in many responses was the potential for there to be consistency of services across Scotland and an end to the 'postcode lottery', whereby services differ across localities. There was an optimism in some responses that nationalised services could not only ensure consistency and diminish regional variation and implementation gaps, but also lead to higher standards of outcomes.

“The Care Inspectorate agrees with the aspiration to achieve greater consistency in the experiences and outcomes for people through the creation of a National Care Service. The Care Inspectorate’s joint inspection overview reports 2012-2017 and 2018-2020 have highlighted the differences in experiences and outcomes for people living in different parts of the country. Examining NHS performance suggests that a single national service will not in itself bring equality of experiences and outcomes, but we acknowledge the potential for greater standardisation and coherence in important aspects such as placement costs, carer fees and workforce strategies.” (Care Inspectorate)

The need for consistency across geographical areas was noted for particular populations, such as children and families in rural areas who can have difficulties accessing resources, families who move between areas, and children with disabilities. By way of example, the Care Inspectorate recognised the barriers experienced by young people and families affected by disability and noted the very different approaches taken by child and adult disability teams as well as variations caused by each local authority having its own policies and eligibility. The Care Inspectorate suggested ways this could be improved, such as more integration of teams, co-location and the sharing of approaches, and the potential for an NCS to reduce local variation. Responses also pointed to the importance of recognising that different groups have different needs.

“The potential for a stronger implementation of a national standard leading to a higher standard of outcome, recognising that equality, diversity and inclusion means that different groups and geographies need different things to achieve a similar outcome.” (Children’s Hearings Scotland)

Young people and professionals who took part in the workshops also wondered if an NCS could reduce the ‘postcode lottery’. Professionals who had worked across a range of local authorities gave vivid examples of how practice could vary significantly across different areas of Scotland and how unfair this was for children and families. They also raised concerns that in the present system there was not enough sharing of best practice across different parts of Scotland, with some areas delivering innovations that were not known or taken up elsewhere.

Despite the optimism that an NCS could potentially provide consistency across Scotland, some consultation responses questioned whether it would in fact still result in a local variation. By way of example, several responses pointed to significant variation around the country in existing healthcare provisions delivered through NHS Scotland services. Some third sector organisations were further concerned that the proposed changes would add another layer of bureaucracy and additional structural barriers, particularly if care services were located outside of local authorities.

“A NCS has the potential to help end the ‘postcode lottery’ of available support. However, the service must not add unnecessary layers of bureaucracy or create additional barriers. For example, we work with families who as a result of complex needs engage with multiple professionals around income maximisation, housing and education etc. If the NCS is an additional public body that is separate from the local authority (who presumably will still hold housing and education), there are questions over whether this will unintentionally create additional structural barriers to individuals and communities accessing holistic, joined up support.” (Barnardo’s Scotland)

Local delivery considered best for meeting the needs of children and families

Many responses expressed concern that a national NCS might limit the current ability of local areas to use local knowledge to be creative and flexible in order to meet the needs of children and families who require support.

“Whilst the NCS may lead to greater standardisation of policy and practice across the country, there is a risk with centralised decision-making that geographically distant and/or smaller regions feel marginalised and flexibility in delivering local solutions to meet local needs is lost, stifling creativity.” (Adoption & Fostering Alliance Scotland)

“Currently, positive, creative work is happening in local areas that consider local needs and context when supporting children with disabilities and their families. Should children’s social work become part of a National Care Service, it is essential that the NCS harnesses skills and knowledge from within communities and local partnerships, and capitalises on effective work that is already taking place.” (Scottish Association of Social Workers)

In the workshops young people also highlighted the importance of choice and flexibility in ways of working to meet individual need. They wondered how an NCS would ensure such choice and flexibility. Similarly, professionals in the workshops highlighted how the present system, with its focus on local services and consultation with local communities could, when it was working well, be more flexible and allow for local creativity and innovation. They worried that a more even and, potentially, rigid structure under the NCS might restrict such opportunities and stifle creative, locally responsive service delivery. Professionals and young people also talked about the value of co-production and meaningful community engagement, which tends to happen at a local level. They wondered how an NCS would facilitate this.

Locally based services, rather than a centralised system, were also seen by stakeholders to be more congruent with the whole family support approach, discussed in the previous section. Responses across the range of stakeholder groups drew on *The Promise* to emphasise the importance of responsive, local community-based services.

“NYJAG supports a whole family approach as championed in *The Promise*, but the focus was on responsive community based services not the creation of a NCS ... On the face of it this would seem to be better if delivered at a local level to enable such a community facing participative and responsive service, shaped by local families. It is difficult to understand how a centralised NCS would achieve this.” (National Youth Justice Advisory Group)

Local authorities too expressed concern about centralisation of social work and social care services within an NCS and Community Health and Social Care Boards, and the impact this would have locally. East Lothian Council, for example, said that this presented a real risk that local need, local context and local initiatives could be lost. The concern was highlighted by Falkirk Council who hosted numerous consultation events to collect views from frontline staff, managers, elected members, community groups, third and independent sector and service users:

***“Concern about the loss of local relationships, knowledge and familiarity came across in all responses. Localised support for families is consistently reported as important from our service users ... Local people are seeking to co-produce local services that meet local need, and want to have investment in their relationships with their social work/ social care staff or team. The NCS will focus overall on national priorities and more detail is required on the how local needs will be reflected.”
(Falkirk Council)***

Across all stakeholder groups, responses also highlighted the need for local autonomy, decision-making and leadership. There was a strong message that “one size does not fit all”.

“While the consultation does set out a rationale for a ‘Once for all of Scotland’ approach, there is little reference to the need for variability across localities. One size does not fit all. We would welcome further detail on how the proposals will include the necessary flexibility to allow for local autonomy to meet different social and geographical needs and demands, whilst maintaining consistent minimum standards applied nationally.” (NSPCC Scotland)

Consideration of the important role of the third sector, particularly at local level

The role of the third sector in provision of local services to children, young people and families was highlighted in responses across the stakeholder groups. As with other areas, responses expressed concern about the lack of information in the proposal as to the role of the third sector. Responses also spoke to the critical importance of third sector providers and indicated that these are, at times, underestimated. Their role, providing services in partnership with local authorities was acknowledged, with emphasis placed on their local knowledge, strong links and collaborative working.

“Families may require support around domestic abuse and the majority of this is provided via the third sector. They may require advocacy support or counselling again provided by the third sector. So whilst there may be some benefits to particular services being within a NCS, the landscape is much more complex than this and the role of the third sector in providing support and working in collaboration with statutory services should not be underestimated.” (Association of Directors of Education)

“The voluntary and community sector plays a critical role within children’s services, a role which should be further recognised by increased investment in third sector staff and training – particularly post pandemic. We know that families have a huge amount of trust in third sector family support services and therefore, the sector must be recognised as a key partner.” (The Glasgow Third Sector Children, Young People and Families Citywide Forum)

“There are a number of risks to the inclusion of children’s services. The most notable of these relate to existing close working and partnerships at local level with education services and for example our smaller local third sector organisations.” (Inverclyde Council Health and Social Care Partnership)

4.4.2 Insufficient detail on funding in the proposal

Organisational responses raised concerns about the lack of detail around funding in the proposal, which created a challenge for organisations in fully considering the implications of including children’s services in an NCS. Nevertheless, responses identified areas to which they considered funding should be directed, such as family support, multi-agency services, mental health and with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Responses also pointed to the importance of ensuring that funding is adequate to prevent uncertainty, ensure provision of sufficient resources, and allow for the delivery of quality services and support that is flexible and timely.

“We feel that the consultation document is vague on the issue of cost and of the baseline figures of investment. We note the statement: “This Government has committed to increase investment in social care by 25%, but public resources are still limited”. We want to see investment get to families and children on the frontline, and for services such as family support to be fully funded as part of our commitment to keep The Promise. We do not want to see children’s services swallowed up within a bureaucratic system where funding does not get to the frontline services which need it most.” (Barnardo’s Scotland)

“Improved access to mental health services will be crucial to success, including for children and young people and with a focus on providing appropriate support before issues around mental health reach crisis point. This may not happen without the appropriate allocation of additional resources.” (Edinburgh Young Carers)

Concerns about funding in local areas

The issue of how funding would be distributed across localities was raised in several responses. In particular, responses raised the concern of how to allocate funding fairly and consistently while supporting adequate resources for local initiatives.

“Would sufficient resources be allocated to the NCS to enable a consistent and fair approach nationally whilst recognising the differing needs and demands across all the Local Authority areas?” (National Youth Justice Advisory Group)

“Local initiatives will need to be protected in any structural change. Adequate resourcing for effective family support at an early stage remains the greatest priority.” (Care Inspectorate)

A particular issue raised about local level funding was around local authority funding, with some responses commenting on a reduction in funding over recent years.

“Local councils and children’s services have seen their funding reduced year upon year and have not had the resources to be able to provide the level of service needed and thresholds have risen ever higher. They have been unable to deliver the level of service required and more investment in local councils may be at least part of the answer of improving outcomes for children and families.” (Parenting across Scotland)

There was concern expressed that establishment and implementation of a new NCS could divert funding away from supporting implementation of The Promise, including important preventative approaches and investment in local services.

“The primary focus regarding Children’s Services should be delivering on what the Care Review told Scotland is required to ensure that children grow up ‘loved, safe and respect’. The valuable cost and time required to establish new structural legislation and governance would be better allocated to improving existing structures and injecting much needed resource into underfunded local services.” (COSLA)

“There will be unintended costs and consequences of any change which is proposed. The current organisational structures could benefit from the funding being allocated to ensure the implementation of the Integrated Children’s Plans and The Promise. There could be impact on the implementation of The Promise as focus could be diverted to the inclusion of Children’s Social Work within a National Care Service instead of concentrating on The Plan for The Promise.” (Northern Alliance)

Tensions in funding children's services

Many organisations raised concerns that children's services would be deprioritised in an NCS, with funding redirected to meet demands for adult care, particularly in light of pressures placed on adult care by an ageing population.

“It is our concern, and one shared by many other organisations that support children too, that the proposition of a single body with responsibility for both adult services and children's services runs a very real risk of a relative deprioritisation of funding and resourcing for children's social work and care. In part, this could be because of the scale of the acute issues facing adult care too and Scotland's ageing population.” (CELCIS)

“The risk that the scale of ambition of building a new service will divert attention. Significant additional resources are required urgently for CAMHS. The needs and views of children and families must not be allowed to become lost in the design of a service originally intended to address significant challenges in older people's care.” (Children's Hearings Scotland)

Conversely, other organisations questioned what would happen with funding if children's services were not included.

“NYJAG recognised the potential risk to children's services if not part of a NCS which included all social work and social care services. What would the resource implications be for children's services not part of the social work profession in the NCS?” (National Youth Justice Advisory Group)

Responses also highlighted differences and tensions in how funding is approached in adult and children's services. Some responses explicitly addressed how funding and budgeting should be approached, with recommendations for a human-rights, including children's rights, approach to budgeting.

“The mixed market of care within adult social care contrasts with The Promise’s recommendation that the profit motive should be absent from the provision of services to vulnerable children and young people. Detailed consideration needs to be given as to how such tensions will be reconciled within the NCS.” (Adoption & Fostering Alliance)

“It has been clear for some time that all aspects of social care, for children and for adults, are facing a crisis of resources. Whilst The Promise of additional resources in relation to the implementation of the National Care Service is welcome, it is essential that these are focussed on services which need them rather than the implementation of new organisational structures. Decisions on the allocation of these additional resources should be done using a human rights budgeting approach which takes full account of the broad range of human rights of all individuals impacted by the proposals, including children.” (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland)

Responses argued that sufficient funding would enable services to work in partnership, rather than disagree over whose budget resources are drawn from. Transitions from children's to adult services was an example given of an area in which there can be disagreement over whether a young person is a child or an adult and therefore which service is accountable.

“Transitions to adult services are an important point at which it is known things can go well or badly. Having the money follow the child as they grow up and become an adult, both geographically and thematically, could be an important way to avoid current challenges. The focus of the money must be to enable them to flourish, and on meeting their human rights, rather than being constrained by historical, functional, budgets, and can get lost when people move. Transitions to adulthood have historically been constrained by budgets with additional support reflecting system entitlement and not individual needs.” (Children’s Hearings Scotland)

“Transitions is similar to hospital discharge – people try to find a process that will fix ‘the problem’ rather than looking at what is required or needed. Funding is a key issue in the area of transitions – who pays for what. What you see is ASC and children’s social work, arguing over whether the young person is a child or an adult as this decides who is ‘accountable’.” (The Highland Council)

4.4.3 An opportunity to make positive changes around commissioning

Some organisational responses suggested that the creation of an NCS presents an opportunity for much needed transformational change to planning, commissioning and procuring social care support. This was firmly anchored, in some responses, in terms of realising The Promise.

“In the specific context of the needs of children and families, and children and family services, there also is an important opportunity here to systemically influence the focus of commissioning to centre around the five foundations of The Promise. These are key leverage points to underpin any redesign or significant re-orientation of the purpose of the current system in which commissioning will have a significant role to play ... The Promise also provides a roadmap for the key areas for innovation and implementation at a scale that reaches all children and families within the next 10 years. Grounding commissioning and procurement standards and processes in meeting these priorities would increase the possibility of realising The Promise.” (CELSIS)

The lack of detail in the proposal prompted concerns from organisations about how services would be commissioned under the proposed NCS and the implications of this for local authorities and third sector organisations. This included concerns about how commissioning from a nationalised base would impact local services, as well as highlighting the need for longer term funding to support innovative and effective service delivery.

“Moving Children’s Services to a National Care Service would mean potentially significant changes to commissioning and procurement, the implications of which are unclear at this stage... The consultation document has significant impact for large parts of the Local Government workforce. The consultation appears to be unclear on future employer status and whether the aim is to have a single employer or whether services will be commissioned from local authorities.” (SOLACE Scotland; Clackmannanshire Council)

“Concerns were also raised with regards to how commissioning will impact local services should it become nationally driven ... Anxieties surrounding commissioning practice are apparent amongst service providers. Concerns were raised with regards to how commissioning will impact local services should it become nationally driven. Many voiced the need for longer term funding for community health and social care services, to support innovation and enhanced service delivery. Fair pay was also noted as a particular worry. These issues need to be addressed regardless of any structural changes which take place.” (The Glasgow Third Sector Children, Young People and Families Citywide Forum)

4.4.4 Potential benefits of NCS for information sharing and a more integrated system

Some organisations suggested that the NCS offers the opportunity for a more integrated, unified and consistent approach to supporting children and families through improved communication systems and information sharing. Responses noted that sharing information has been a challenging area in implementing GIRFEC. However, it was also suggested that the experience with GIRFEC provided an opportunity to learn from, by drawing on the guidance that had been developed and understanding the need for processes such as data recording systems to be streamlined, with less risk of miscommunication or incomplete information being shared.

“The complexity [of transitions to adulthood] comes from sub optimal communication and transition planning. Both of which can be improved without necessarily amending structures. Joined up systems and information sharing as proposed in Q11 would help Children’s Services interact more effectively with Adult Social Work and Community Health Services.” (Aberdeen City Integration Joint Board)

“The principles of GIRFEC already aims to achieve this across disparate services but with the difficulties associated with different departmental structures and data recording systems there can be risk for miscommunication and incomplete information that could help ensure the child’s wellbeing... Alignment will require agreement over recording systems shared across agencies and across local authority and health board boundaries as well as between primary, community, secondary and tertiary healthcare as well as child and adolescent mental health and education services... A main concern is that currently information sharing is a long way off from being streamlined.” (Children’s Health Scotland)

Responses also pointed to the importance of a human-rights based approach to data management and sharing, with “clarity about how people who access services can access and control their data, and have oversight of how it is stored, handled, and viewed by others” (The Health and Social Care Alliance). Again, it was suggested that the experiences with GIRFEC provided an opportunity for learning.

“Proposals to improve communication and data sharing between the NHS, social care, and people who access services are welcome. In particular, we strongly support plans to develop a unified, integrated and consistent approach to data management and sharing. However, it is essential that this process follows a person centred and human rights based approach, with clarity about how people who access services can access and control their data, and have oversight of how it is stored, handled, and viewed by others. The system should take into account the requirements of children, young people, and their families or carers.”
(The Health and Social Care Alliance)

“However, it is crucial that all information and record sharing is proportionate in compliance with both Human Rights, Children’s Rights reflecting the special consideration for children outlined by the Information Commissioners Office, as well as data protection legislation. There are potentially considerations and learning from information sharing in respect of children under GIRFEC that could be utilised if this is to be progressed. There will also be important learning from the Secure Care Pathway and Standards Scotland and The Promise regarding what and how information is recorded and shared, including language, ownership, and inclusion. In addition, cognisance should be taken of the potential impacts that records relating to offending behaviour criminal convictions may have.”
(Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice)

4.5 Building capacity

The Promise speaks to the importance of children, families and the workforce being supported by a responsive system, where the approach to care is scaffolded to be safe, uphold rights and be open to scrutiny. The consultation responses discussed the following aspects of the structural underpinning of this scaffolding, described in Plan 21-24:

Governance structures

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.

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.

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.

4.5.1 The need for structural change

Plan 21-24 speaks to the need, identified in The Promise, for reorienting the scaffolding of the approach to care to the needs of children and families. Consultation responses discussed issues around how structural change might be important in this regard, but some also argued for cultural change.

Structural change alone will not bring about the changes needed

Responses across the stakeholder groups argued that structural change alone was not sufficient to address the challenges and barriers faced by children and families. Quarriers, for example, argued that structural reform would not necessarily support factors that enabled services to support children and families, such as committed leadership and strong local partnerships, professionals that are connected to each other and their communities and are empowered to meet families' needs, and a dynamic use of local data to identify risk early and to build in prevention to service design.

“The structural changes proposed would not necessarily reduce the complexity experienced by supported people and their families. It is likely that a change in structural arrangements will serve to shift where the complexity is experienced, rather than resolve it.” (Angus Community Planning Partnership)

“We would therefore suggest that inclusion of children’s services in the NCS is not an essential component to achieving a single practice model across children and adult services; implementation science and experience would point towards investment, strong and adaptive leadership (composed of a determination to overcome the problems encountered), facilitative administration and time, as all being more important to success than structures.” (Social Work Scotland)

Local leadership was highlighted in some responses as having the greatest impact on improving collaborative working and outcomes.

“Structural boundaries to make something better may make something worse. Leadership and commitment is key.” (Clackmannanshire & Stirling Health and Social Care Partnership)

“If The Promise is our guiding light to ensuring that children in Scotland ‘grow up loved, safe and respected’ then the focus should be on investing in achieving this through collaborative leadership and innovative partnerships, at the local level.” (COSLA)

“The key to improvement in collaborative working has to be about leadership as opposed to structural change and children’s services leadership sits firmly within the children’s services planning arrangements which includes GIRFEC and Child Protection Committees alongside public protection.” (Association of Directors of Education)

Practitioners in the workshops also put a central focus on the importance of leadership. There was concern that centralised processes could, depending on how they were constructed, undermine and diminish the power of existing local leadership and community engagement processes.

There is a greater need for cultural change than structural change

While there appeared to be agreement that some kind of reform of children’s services is needed, responses from across stakeholder groups emphasised that the focus needed to be on cultural change, rather than structural change. Some organisational responses reinforced a key Promise message, inherent in Plan 21-24, that the scaffolding of the approach to care must promote supportive relationships and uphold children’s rights. In doing so, the importance of relational practice with children and families was recognised, as was children and young people’s rights, particularly to have a voice and be heard. In this respect, greater importance was placed on the ethos under which organisations operated and the practices being delivered within the services that the structures they were operating within.

“Whether it is decided that structural reform is necessary or not, there is a strong consensus that reform is needed and that it must be built on a number of fundamental principles, outlined in The Promise and through the incorporation of the UNCRC, the practical impact of which is that children and families experience preventive, consistent rights-led and relationship-based support, which they have choice, control and agency over.” (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland)

In this context, many responses made reference to the substantial work on transformational change which is underway with the commitment from organisations and local government to implement actions identified in The Promise. The proposed structural changes were seen by some organisations as diverting attention and challenging the aspirations and ethos of the transformational change called for in keeping The Promise. Regardless of whether organisations favoured the inclusion of children’s services in an NCS or not, the importance of not losing the focus on transformational work being implemented around The Promise was highlighted across responses.

“The Promise places emphasis on the cultural transformation, rather than the system or structural changes. Many people felt that there was no point in setting up a new structure if the culture remains the same.” (The Glasgow Third Sector Children, Young People and Families Citywide Forum)

“Families Outside is of the view that the priority for the Scottish Government and local authorities must be on delivering The Promise and not a reorganisation of people, money, and resources. The Promise sets out ambitious proposals that get to the heart of what social work should achieve.” (Families Outside)

“Currently, The Promise is the key policy driver within children’s services ... The Promise provides the vision and the Plan to make cultural and systemic shifts so desperately needed for children and families likely to interface with social work and social care services. Therefore, it is crucial that nothing distracts or undermines the established Plan and the work that will continue up to 2030.” (Aberlour Child Care Trust)

4.5.2 Considerations related to structural change

The need for clarity around the proposed structural changes and governance arrangements

A range of views were expressed in responses related to the processes by which organisations responsible for the delivery of children’s services are directed, controlled and held to account. The current variation in governance arrangements across localities was acknowledged in many responses. Some responses expressed hopes that greater accountability to Scottish Ministers and Government, if children’s services were included in an NCS, might facilitate improved consistency and quality, and help achieve equity of services and outcomes. However, further consultation and consideration of how this would operate was requested to provide clarity.

“Children’s services inclusion in the NCS would streamline governance structures but the links with local authority and the role of Elected Members needs more consideration and explanation to ensure new arrangements do not weaken local scrutiny and accountability.” (Falkirk Council)

“However, it could be argued that the development and implementation of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 should have taken more account of the impact on services for children and young people. We would stress the need to carefully consider the specific needs of children and young people in taking forward any new governance arrangements. This requires understanding of the differences in how children’s services are delivered and who delivers them, including the role of the third sector in providing critical family support; what the key relationships are; how the rights of young people must be realised and supported; and the strategies for engagement and participation needed for children and young people, in comparison with adults.” (Care Inspectorate)

“The NCS could increase accountability for children’s services and for achieving equity of outcome. Moving accountability to Scottish Ministers could improve accountability for improvement and for dealing with feedback and complaints, if there is a clearer line of accountability and clearer understanding of children’s rights. However there are some specifics of the Children’s Hearing system, relating to the status of the National Convener and independent decision making on behalf of the child, which respondents felt needed to be worked out.” (Children’s Hearings Scotland)

Some responses, particularly from third sector organisations, went a step further in emphasising the importance of collaboration between all sectors, organisations and services that work with children and families. It was recognised that an NCS could play a key role in facilitating this, potentially “acting as a connector”, as Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans described it. The Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice highlighted the complexity of governance in terms of data and measures particularly in relation to the issues around what is and is not included in an NCS.

“A National Care Service has the potential to create better alignment if it adopts an approach that puts children and families at the centre and views their needs as interconnected. We see this as the National Care Service being a connector, linking up different services where a child can access the support they need... We would like to see the third sector included fully here with the National Care Service acting as a connector for families accessing primary health care to have the opportunity to engage with other forms of support provided by health and social care charities who possess the relevant knowledge and specialist experience.” (Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans)

Responses also raised questions around the role of the current regulatory bodies.

“Our members also questioned the role of the Scottish Social Services Council (the regulator for the social work, social care and early years workforce in Scotland) and the role of the Care Inspectorate (the national scrutiny body responsible for the registration and regulation of care services). If social work and social care services are to be combined under a new National Care Service, what would this mean for the Early Learning and Childcare sector?” (Children in Scotland)

“While it is likely that improvements could be made in the relationships and cooperation among regulatory bodies, it is difficult to answer this question without clarity about the regulatory bodies in scope. The SSSC already works closely with other regulatory and scrutiny bodies. Scotland should have a common platform from which organisations and professionals can learn from, for example, significant case reviews and realise national agendas such as The Promise.” (Scottish Association of Social Workers)

Organisational responses acknowledged both the gains that have been made in policy over recent years for children and families, and areas where policy has failed or continues to be problematic or lack cohesion. The range of policies with overlapping areas was noted, as was the need for reconciling these.

“Concerns have been raised by our members about how the inclusion of children’s services in the National Care Service would work to implement and reconcile several overlapping policy areas and existing initiatives pertaining to children’s services. It is imperative that the National Care Service delivers the outcomes set out by:

- ***Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)***
- ***The Promise***
- ***UNCRC incorporation 63***
- ***The National Guidance for Child Protection***
- ***The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017***
- ***The Bairns’ Hoose (Scottish Barnhaus) Report***
- ***Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential***
- ***Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board***
- ***Part 13 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 protecting sibling relationships for children in care”***

(Health and Social Care Alliance)

“Aligning planned and ongoing change - change that it is important to note has been driven by children and their families’ experiences and voices and that has been committed to them - may be challenging and it is important this is not hindered, stifled or lost within any structural change.” (Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice)

Concern about impact on positive local partnership working

Responses reported numerous examples of where work was going well to support children and families. Many were concerned that this could be disrupted by a move to include children’s services in an NCS. Local authorities were positive about aspects of their current delivery of children’s services. A key part of this positivity is local collaboration and partnerships in providing services, with some responses, across all stakeholder groups, specifically noting the impact this was having on work toward keeping The Promise.

“Local partnerships have been tasked with responding to need and providing supports at a time when children and families require them and with the full participation of children, families and young people in decision making ... It is unclear how the establishment of a NCS would deliver this.” (National Youth Justice Advisory Group)

“We believe that local decision making and accountability, through existing and emerging local relationships and partnerships, ensures pace and flexibility, aligned to our local priorities... We are concerned that this would be lost in a national model, noting that there is no evidence presented, which demonstrates that children’s services would be improved by developing a national model with no knowledge of local partnerships and services. We are therefore concerned that a move to a National Care Service, as proposed, would have unintended and detrimental consequences to our well-functioning partnerships.” (East Ayrshire Council & East Ayrshire Integrated Joint Board)

Organisational responses expressed some confusion over how services would work together under the proposed NCS. This is a critical area in which more detail is needed from Scottish Government to provide clarity and allow organisations, including local authorities and national public bodies, to assess the potential challenges and opportunities it might provide.

“... while better joint working between children’s health and children’s social work services is essential to achieving better outcomes for children and families, so is better joint working with education, early learning and childcare, third sector and a range of adult services. Structural change will not necessarily resolve this issue on its own.” (Care Inspectorate)

Challenges if not all services included

Some responses suggested that challenges will be posed if not all services are included. These included risks to existing local partnerships that are working well, and to partnership working at local and national levels with services that would not be included in NCS.

“The children’s social work landscape is hugely complex, with the position of children in conflict with the law and youth justice a particular example of this. These children are some of our most vulnerable, victimised and traumatised and are usually supported across systems-childcare, welfare, child protection, the Children’s Hearings System, youth justice, criminal justice, public protection, children’s services, adult services, adult protection, education and health - often simultaneously. The location of this support also covers a wide range of settings: at home, in kinship care, foster care, the community, residential care, hospital settings, secure care and custody. Often, and rightly so given that contact with the youth justice system is ironically the biggest factor in whether someone will continue offending, these children are supported by services out with social work and social care (CYCJ, 2016). This includes universal services - education and health; third sector partners; specialist services such as CAMHS and addiction services; housing; employability and training. With such an array of services involved, complexity in accessing services and the risk of falling between services is real for children. A similar picture is echoed for children in or on the edges of secure care. If the NCS could support addressing these challenges and improving consistency - not just of service provision but of data, benchmarks, performance and outcome measures - this would be beneficial. However, if one or more of these sectors are included in the NCS and others are out with, there is a potential risk that these children become even more excluded, marginalised and transitions made even more difficult.”
(Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice CYCJ)

Questioning the timing of structural change

In responses from both local authorities and third sector organisations, particular attention was drawn to the timing of the proposed change. Some suggested that it was not a good time to bring in structural changes and the likely disruption that would accompany these, given the upheaval that had been created by the pandemic. Responses also pointed to the significant policy and practice changes over recent years, including those brought about through engagement in transformation of services as called for in The Promise. Several local government body responses, including SOLACE, COSLA and Clackmannanshire Council, drew on a recent report by Children in Scotland to highlight that “a period of stability is essential”.

“Over and above The Promise, the level of policy change in the past year, in addition to dealing with the demands of the COVID pandemic, has been significant. These will take time to embed and support the workforce to understand their implications. There is a real risk the positive impacts these legislative and policy changes will not be realised due to the upheaval of the proposed structural reorganisation. The Government also needs to take time to join up its own policy thinking and direction of reform for children services between “The Promise”, the National Care Service, the UNCRC and its response to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) review on the education system. There is currently no coherence and no clarity that there is the capacity and capability nationally and locally to cope with this extent of reform across universal and specialist children services.”
(Community Planning Aberdeen)

Local government responses, in particular, addressed some of the risks that might be associated with structural change. These were primarily around the risk that focusing attention on restructuring may lead to further uncertainty for staff (as noted above) and direct organisational capacity and attention away from improving existing services for people.

“The focus on creating a whole new structure will have a detrimental impact upon Children and Young People’s wellbeing. Rather than services being about improvement (as they currently are) there will be years spent on disentangling the current services and arrangements at significant cost with no evidence base that it is required or supported.” (South Ayrshire Council SNP Group; South Ayrshire Integrated Joint Board)

“There is also significant risk that such extensive and continuous change to bring about public service reform itself becomes a barrier to public service improvement.” (Association of Directors of Education)

While some participants in the engagement workshops did think that structural change was necessary and were sceptical of the need for a period of stability, they were nervous about the timing and focus. They said that cultural change had been at the heart of The Promise and they were not convinced, due to a lack of detail in the proposals, that proposed structural changes would enable cultural change.

4.5.3 Risk that structural change derails work toward keeping The Promise

A prominent theme was that inclusion of children’s services in an NCS would detract focus away from The Promise and risk “derailing” or “undermining” the work already underway. Some responses highlighted the timeframe, with references to delivering on The Promise by 2030 and to Plan 21-24, and to work currently underway toward keeping The Promise.

A key concern was the risk of The Promise being overshadowed by the NCS. This included the risk of a “disconnect” and “diluting commitment” to The Promise, by focusing attention, energy and resources on making and adapting to structural changes.

“The Promise has to be prioritised and supported to achieve its aims of improving children’s services in Scotland. The Promise provides the vision and the Plan to make cultural and systemic shifts so desperately needed for children and families likely to interface with social work and social care services. Therefore, it is crucial that nothing distracts or undermines the established Plan and the work that will continue up to 2030.” (Aberlour Child Care Trust)

“The independent care review was rooted in the voices of people who had, and currently receive, care. It was a multi-stage, deep-dive process which sought to prevent more children being removed from their families by proposing a radical, wholesale change programme. Currently 18 months in, and with a level of engagement and support which is unprecedented in contemporary Scotland there is a risk that work currently under way to overhaul children and families’ experiences will be deprioritised.” (Children 1st)

COSLA’s response, for example, informed by engagement with professional associations across Local Government and partners in service delivery, stated:

“In all of the engagements COSLA has undertaken it is the potential impact that the proposals in the consultation have on the implementation of The Promise that cause the most concern.” (COSLA).

The questions that need to be answered

05

A strongly recurring theme, throughout the analysis of responses that made direct reference to The Promise, was the need for more information before respondents felt able to make an informed, considered decision about whether children's services should be included in an NCS. This was summed up by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration:

“We think that further work is required to explain the functions of the NCS in relation to children's services, the relationship with The Promise, the benefits that will accrue specifically to children and their families, and how the complex risks will be mitigated.”

The following questions have been distilled from those raised in consultation responses and the workshops with care-experienced young people and professionals. These are the questions that need to be answered by Scottish Government, to enable organisations and individuals to effectively engage with the possibility of including children's services in an NCS.

1

What actual difference would creating an NCS make in children's lives?

- What is going to change in children's lives?
- How can we focus on getting the right support at the right time to children and families?
- What is the role of the NCS in addressing poverty?

2

How will an NCS function in relation to children's services? How will it actually work?

- How will an NCS make the system less complex to navigate?
- Is the NCS integrating social work and social care services with health and other key partners in collaborative working, or it is integrating structures at different organisational levels?

- To what extent would the proposed changes differ in practice from current arrangements and relationships in relation to IJBs?
- Is the proposed alignment with health services about shared languages, approaches and professional relationships, or is it about the geographical boundaries of services, or lines of accountability? Or all of these?
- In an NCS, what will happen to the role of current regulatory bodies; the Scottish Social Services Council and the Care Inspectorate?
- How will the complex risks associated with any changes be mitigated?
- How will the NCS rebuild services stripped away under austerity and depleted during the pandemic?
- How does an NCS help us work better together?

3

How will an NCS ensure listening to and meaningfully involving children and young people is embedded in decision-making and service development at all levels, strategic and individual?

- How will co-production with young people be ensured and facilitated within the NCS?
- How will it ensure a wide range of young people are involved in ongoing co-production of services?
- How will an NCS ensure listening to and involving children and young people is prioritised – a part of the culture, rather than a tick box exercise?
- How will changes be communicated to young people?

4

How will an NCS create better integration of services and transitions between them?

- How will transitions be facilitated across new organisational boundaries?
- Will an NCS help services to be all joined up?

- Will an NCS create new and seamless pathways or more and increasingly complex pathways?
- How will the NCS improve transitions between child and adolescent mental health services?
- How will waiting lists be addressed?

5

How will an NCS make the experience of children and families more straightforward, seamless and easy to navigate?

- How will links between services be protected and improved in a National Care Service?
- Will an NCS, separate from the local authority, create additional structural barriers to individuals and communities accessing holistic, joined up support, such as social care, housing and education?

6

How will links to services that are not included in the NCS, such as education, early years learning and childcare, and housing be protected and strengthened?

- How will other services interface with the NCS e.g. the NHS, Care Inspectorate?
- What are the implications of an NCS for the Early Learning and Childcare sector?

7

What are the implications for statutory responsibilities, including public and child protection and corporate parenting, which currently sit with local authorities?

- Where will professional accountability lie – for child protection, for implementation of legal orders, for Chief Social Work Officer responsibilities?
- How will the complexity of public protection and child protection be managed?

8

How will an NCS enable the relationship-based practice and culture that children want and need?

- Will the NCS ensure services are delivered with humanity and warmth? Or will it make it harder?
- Will practitioners get more time with children rather than looking at a laptop?
- Will an NCS provide social work and its partners with an enabling context within which to affect meaningful, positive, sustainable change for children and families?

9

How will an NCS allow for local innovation and flexibility in response to local needs? How will an NCS enable consistent and fair provision of services across Scotland?

- How does a large national body make a difference locally, where that change will be felt?
- How will NCS ensure that family support services in local communities are fit for purpose? Will they inspect services?
- Will sufficient resources be allocated to the NCS to enable a consistent and fair approach nationally whilst recognising the differing needs and demands across all the Local Authority areas?

10

How will an NCS ensure that children and young people's needs are seen and understood, and not lost under adults' needs or in the view from an adult lens?

- How does the NCS organise and enable early intervention?
- How will the NCS make sure resourcing is equal across services?
- How will spending be prioritised? Will there be competition for funding between parts of the service for young people and adults?
- How will it free up resources for family support?
- What would the resource implications be if children's services are not part of the social work profession in the NCS?

11

How will an NCS support and develop its workforce?

- Is this the right time to be introducing new processes, structures and systems for workers to navigate?
- How will there be shared understanding across practice groups/ professions? Would expertise be lost?
- What will the social work role be in the NCS? Is this a chance to reimagine social work?
- How will the NCS improve the terms and working conditions of social work and ensure that people stay in the profession?
- How will a focus on ecological and systems approaches and working with multiple contexts be retained and developed by social workers within NCS? Is there an opportunity, through the NCS, to ensure all professions develop a better understanding of the importance of an ecological approach?

12

How can we make sure that an NCS helps us to keep the Promise and improves outcomes for children and families?

- How will the NCS function in relationship with The Promise?
- Will The Promise be a priority for the NCS so that it is being implemented at the same time?
- How will the NCS change organisational culture around addressing poverty?
- What does implementing The Promise mean for the different areas of children's service provision?
- How will the NCS integrate The Promise to engage across the justice system, housing, child protection, children hearing system, third sector and wider society?
- What changes need to be made to really implement The Promise?

Implications for keeping the promise

06

This report focuses on responses to the proposed inclusion of children’s services in an NCS and the challenges and opportunities that such change potentially raises for keeping The Promise. Throughout the report, the responses of organisations and individuals who referenced The Promise have been clear that implementing the change called for in The Promise is crucial to ensuring that Scotland fulfils its ambition to be the best place in the world to grow up, so that every child grows up loved, safe, and respected, able to realise their full potential. The findings, from the analysis and workshops, point to widespread concern that plans to incorporate children services into the proposed NCS risks derailing these developments and further overwhelming an already depleted workforce. This is not to say that respondents did not see potential benefits to an NCS, but the proposals lacked the necessary detail to allow informed decision making and a lot of responses indicated that the stakes for children and their families are too high to take such a risk without further consultation and a closer look at what is needed.

“Any alternative options for service delivery or redesign must be fully evidenced based, made in consultation with children and families, the Local Government workforce, our professional associations and third sector partners to determine the best operating model to achieve our aspirations of The Promise and in meeting our collective responsibilities under the UNCRC. The question should be focused on ‘how do we create the best services for children and families in Scotland?’ rather than, ‘We’re setting up a NCS for adult services; should Children’s Services be included?’” (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)

The express aim of Scottish Government’s proposal that children’s social work and social care services be located within the NCS was to ensure a more cohesive integration of health, social work, and social care. There is a shared focus with The Promise, therefore, on the provision of appropriate and timely care and support to meet the needs of children and families. However, while the consultation stated that “the overarching purpose will be to ensure consistent delivery of services to the most vulnerable children and families, which is inextricably related to the provision of services to adults”, The Promise has an intent far broader than service provision. The Promise made by all political parties in Scotland, on 5th February 2020, was to implement all the conclusions of the Independent Care Review, so “every child grows up loved, safe and respected, able to realise their full potential.” Service delivery is obviously an important aspect of that, but as Plan 21-24 clearly states, the intention is not to build a new ‘care 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, p.9)

In the process of this analysis, key overarching issues have emerged that have implications for keeping The Promise, regardless of whether or not children’s services are ultimately included in an NCS. This section flags the concerns of organisations and individuals that, although originally written in response to the NCS consultation, provide a valuable resource for work to achieve the kind of transformational change called for to realise The Promise and bring about the changes articulated in Plan 21-24.

6.1 Listen to children and young people

“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 they want and need. There must be a compassionate and caring decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.” (The Promise, p. 12)

Listening to the voices of children and young people is a core foundation for realising The Promise and a fundamental principle of Plan 21-24, with The Promise explicitly recognising the importance of structural and system listening. The lack of consultation with children and young people in the NCS proposal development and consultation process, was highlighted time and time again in the responses and workshops. The NCS consultation process is not only a missed opportunity in this regard, it also signals a huge challenge for keeping The Promise.

The lack of recognition in the consultation process of the rights of care experienced children and young people to engage and participate in decisions and change that affect them, underlines the need to ensure that children and young people's voices are supported and listened to whatever direction is taken next. It is critically important for keeping The Promise that this is not a one-off tick box exercise. Responses called for the practices around consultation, co-production and advocacy for and with children and young people to be further developed and understood as ongoing, relational work.

6.2 Have ALL children and young people at the centre

“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’.” (Plan 21-24, p.14)

Responses pointed to the need for a fundamental shift in how decisions are made about children and families, as called for in The Promise, which requires that the highest priority in systems and services needs to be what matters to children and families. The consultation responses and workshops discussed the importance of recognising the specific needs of children, young people and their families. Innovative and compassionate models of whole family support and exciting projects elevating the voices and engaging the skills of care experienced young people were highlighted. While structural change holds an opportunity for building on this and ensuring prioritisation of children and young people, there was much concern that the NCS proposal had treated children services as “bolted on” to adult services. Consequently, a further concern was that the practice wisdom and expertise of the sector would be diluted and even lost if it was incorporated into a predominately adult focused NCS. These concerns speak to the challenge of keeping the needs of children and families at the core of decision-making about changes to service and system delivery.

The diversity of the care experienced population and wide range of care pathways was not reflected in the NCS consultation. Workshop discussion highlighted the lack of attention given to intersecting issues, such as disability, age, gender, and culture. Keeping The Promise requires understanding and planning for all children, and for all different types of living arrangements (or 'care' placements). For example, progress was noted in support for kinship care, while the acute shortage of foster carers was seen as a growing crisis.

6.3 Tensions around scaffolding and planning

***“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 Promise, p.25)***

The following key issues identified in the analysis as areas of tension, also provide insight into opportunities and challenges with regard to how best to keep The Promise and meet the needs of all children and families across Scotland.

Local vs national 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.” (Plan 21-24, p.32)

A key challenge identified in the analysis and workshops was finding the balance between responsiveness to local needs and consistency in service provision nationally. Respondents recognised that an NCS might address the need for accessible, equitable services, which are delivered consistently across Scotland and were critical of the current 'postcode lottery' of services. However, there were also deep concerns expressed that responsiveness to local need and partnership within communities might be lost under national proposals. Consultation responses and workshop discussions suggested there is exciting, innovative work going on to deliver The Promise in different parts of Scotland, with successful existing partnerships, and local organisations able to build the relationships that allow people to feel comfortable in engaging in participation and co-production. Responses also highlighted the crucial role of local leadership in developing and sustaining innovation and culture change.

Integration or (new) fragmentation of services

“Scotland’s family support services will feel and be experienced as integrated to those who use them.” (Plan 21-24, p.27)

An opportunity was identified in the responses for better integration of services for children, young people and families, and the potential for improvements around commissioning and information sharing. The value of more seamless transitions between child and adult services was repeatedly cited in responses as a possible benefit of a new NCS. However, it was recognised that many other crucial services, particularly education, early years childcare and learning, youth work and housing, might become further distanced. The efforts to bring social work and education together under GIRFEC were recognised and respondents pointed to the challenges and benefits that had emerged from this work. Concerns were expressed that the structural changes required by the NCS would disrupt these developments, undermining a sense of shared responsibility. This linked to worries about professional accountability across child protection and safeguarding. Structural change has the potential to disrupt processes and respondents and workshop participants repeatedly raised concerns about progress being undermined or lost.

Prioritise allocation of funds and resources

***“Investment in the lives of children and families will be considered strategically and holistically in the context of their experiences.”
(Plan 21-24, p.33)***

Responses highlighted the importance of having sufficient funding and resourcing, for being able to deliver services that support children and families in a timely way. There were perceived threats to funding for children’s services, whether this was managed locally or nationally. However, responses also indicated that structural change potentially provides opportunities to ensure that funding for children’s services is prioritised and to put in place systems of human-rights, children’s-rights, based budgeting.

6.4 Develop and support the workforce

“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.” (The Promise, p.22)

Consultation responses and workshops raised concerns related to the workforce engaged in delivering children’s services. Workshop participants discussed how important the workforce will be in delivering The Promise. However, there was much concern about the impact the pandemic has had on the social work and social care workforce, making a challenging situation worse, with staff feeling depleted and more people leaving the profession. A crucial question asked by professionals was: How will the NCS support and develop its workforce? Social workers were concerned about the role of the profession in the NCS and to what extent there would be space for their unique and vital contribution. Worries were expressed about high vacancy rates, large caseloads and a lack of resources taking their toll in some areas. Respondents were clear that progress to meet the challenges of The Promise implementation will not be possible without a well-trained, well supported and resourced workforce who feel valued and respected.

6.5 The need for both structural and cultural change

The responses and workshop discussions with professionals and young people identified potential opportunities offered by the NCS, which point to the idea that structural change could be beneficial. Alongside this, there was an appreciation of the transformational impact The Promise could have on services, which responses and discussion clearly indicated requires cultural change. Workshop participants spoke of changing cultures, hearts and minds, and asked:

“How will an NCS enable more humanity and warmth in practice to ensure an approach which is aligned with The Promise?” (Professional, Workshop 3)

It was unclear to respondents how the NCS would enable such culture change. While inefficient structures and a lack of resources were seen to inhibit this, respondents were clear that culture change requires attention to a wider range of elements. There were concerns that a preoccupation with more structural change, such as an NCS, would undermine the progress on culture change and implementing The Promise. Concerns were raised as to what impact structural change would have on governance and commissioning. These concerns are clearly relevant beyond the proposed changes with inclusion of children’s services in an NCS. Rather, this was recognised in many responses as a challenge for implementation of The Promise in any system, including the existing one. As one professionals’ workshop participant said, “The Promise is not a done deal, and some areas still need convincing”. However, alongside the concerns expressed as to how cultural change can be enabled, there were also expressions of optimism in responses about the work that was already underway.

Conclusion

07

This is the final report from a project with the overall aim to capture and learn from the views of stakeholders as to the impact of Scottish Government's proposal to establish an NCS on Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise that every child grows up loved, safe and respected, able to realise their full potential. An interim report (March 2022) identified key emerging themes and highlighted areas for further consideration.¹ This final report presents the findings from analysis of consultation responses that make direct reference to The Promise, and workshops with care-experienced young people and professionals who work with and support them.

A strongly recurring theme throughout the consultation responses, and echoed in workshops, was the need for more information to enable organisations and individuals to engage effectively with questions about whether children's services should be included in an NCS. This report contains a non-exhaustive list of questions, formed from the many questions respondents and workshop participants had about the proposals.

The focus of this analysis has been on opening up the analytic space around children's services and the NCS. This task is particularly valuable with a consultation as vast and cross-cutting as the NCS consultation. There is a wealth of experience and insight in the responses by organisations and individuals to the consultation, with some responses incorporating specific work done by organisations to gather information from member organisations, young people or others that they work with. While this report is focused on the insights provided in the responses about the opportunities and challenges for The Promise of incorporating children's services in an NCS, many of the issues raised and the expertise provided is relevant and valuable to keeping The Promise whether or not this specific proposal is taken forward. The report therefore finishes with a consideration of the implications of the key interrelating themes from the responses for keeping The Promise.

Listening to the views, experiences and expertise of all those impacted by the proposed changes, children, young people and families, practitioners and organisations who work with and support them, is central to this conversation and essential in the decision-making process. It must be embedded throughout the processes of transformational change to enable Scottish Government to hear what matters to children, young people and families, and make more informed decisions about where the best opportunities for service reform and development lie. Listening to and engaging with children and young people also allows longstanding and unspoken assumptions to be exposed and challenged, creating a more grounded and meaningful foundation for change to build upon.

¹ NCS Consultation Responses Analysis: Interim report, available online: [NCS Consultation Responses Analysis \(thepromise.scot\)](https://thepromise.scot)

The analysis of responses and engagement workshops has highlighted the frustrations and aspirations of young people, professionals and organisations who are engaged with children, young people and families. There is a general consensus that there needs to be improvement to children's social care and social work services and improved outcomes for children, young people and families, but there is not agreement that including children's services in an NCS is the most effective way to bring this about. Whether or not proposals to include children's services in an NCS are progressed, this analysis has highlighted the importance of orienting conversations around change and children's services to the differences any change would make for children, young people's and families' experiences. In the words of one of the care experienced young people who participated in the engagement workshop about the proposal to include children's services in the proposed NCS:

***“What actual difference is it going to make?
Kids don't care whether people caring for them
work for Local Authorities or Government.
It has to change something.”***



Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

08

Analysis of published responses to the Scottish Government Consultation – A National Care Service for Scotland

The purpose of this project is to consider responses to Scottish Government’s consultation on the creation of a National Care Service (NCS), from the perspective of the opportunities and risks these proposals present to Scotland’s commitment to #KeepThePromise. In line with the project aims, particular areas of the consultation and particular responses have been prioritised for analysis. Specifically, this report focuses on responses to a) Chapter 3a of the consultation document, Scottish Government’s proposal to include children’s services in the establishment of an NCS, and b) other sections in which specific reference was made to The Promise.

1,096 consultation responses were made publicly available on Citizen Space, 1 February 2022. Scottish Government reported that 1,291 responses were received, and that of these 703 were from individuals, 575 from organisations, and 13 did not choose either of these categories. The difference in number of responses received and those made publicly available may be accounted for by some respondents having refused permission to publish or responses been removed through a Scottish Government redaction process.

Searches were undertaken using Citizen Space search function to identify those responses which directly reference The Promise, in line with the project purpose. The initial search using the keyword “promise” resulted in a sample of 141 responses. Each response was screened to ascertain the context in which “promise” was used, resulting in the exclusion of 45 responses (where for example “promise” was used in a different context), leaving a total of 96 responses. As the Citizen Space search function does not cover attachments, for example, where organisations provided pdf documents in addition or instead of using the Citizen Space response format, manual screening of responses from organisations engaged in discussions around The Promise was carried out. This resulted in an additional 17 responses, which directly referenced The Promise in attachments.

The searches resulted in a total of 113 responses that made direct reference to The Promise, 81 responses from organisations and 31 from individuals (one individual had submitted two identical responses, which has been counted as one response).

Responses from the 81 identified organisations and 31 identified individuals were recorded on a spreadsheet, then mapped to classify the type of organisation or their identification as a practitioner or professional working with children and young people, and where and how they have referenced #KeepThePromise in their response.

The data set analysed for this report consisted of text from responses to Chapter 3a of the consultation document, and sections of other chapters in which specific reference was made to The Promise. A thematic analysis was undertaken which involved a) generating initial codes into a coding framework, by identifying factors across the data set, b) recording data to each code, c) collating codes into potential themes, and d) reviewing and refining themes through iterative analysis. The final stage of analysis involved writing up the themes, with selected quotations provided to illustrate the themes and ensure the analysis remains grounded in the organisations' own words. The quotes provided in the report are therefore not intended to be representative of the sample.

Engagement workshops with young people and professionals

A critical component of the project was engagement with young people and professionals. The purpose of these was to help shape the analysis, by grounding it in lived experience and highlighting important issues and directions for the analysis.

A small group of care experienced young people and a small group of professionals supporting care experienced young people were recruited through existing contacts of research team members, which include Who Cares? Scotland and the TRIUMPH network. Over the course of the project these groups each met three times to explore emergent findings from the analysis, with up to six participants in each workshop.

This report draws on material generated by the conversations in the three workshops held separately with each group, between February and April 2022. The workshops were held online and were two hours duration.

Workshop 1

Focussed on introducing the National Care Service and proposal to include children's services to workshop participants and discussing their thoughts around this. Some initial findings of the consultation response analyses were presented to the participants, with a small selection of quotes for reflection and critical exploration.

Workshop 2

Involved sharing key emerging themes from the analysis for discussion and feedback. The workshop with young people included the development of personas for an exploration of what they needed and how inclusion of children's services in NCS would help that or not. These personas were then used in the workshop with professionals to reflect on pathways through care and how an NCS would impact on these, as well as in relation to different groups of children and young people.

Workshop 3

Focused on further exploring challenges and opportunities in the Scottish Government's proposal for inclusion of children's services in the NCS, and the questions that needed to be answered in order to assess these. The workshop with professionals also considered children's services through the lens of Plan 21-24 and the actions needed to align with the priority areas.

Ethical considerations were addressed as follows:

- A plain-English email inviting participants to attend the workshop was sent to young people and professionals who had established relationships with a member of the team. The invitation email explained the aims of the project, purpose of the workshop, and what it would involve. Potential participants were also asked to share the invitation. The email let them know that if they had a peer or colleague who was interested in attending, the facilitator would be available to chat with them before the first workshop.
- Potential participants were asked to respond by email indicating their intention to attend. At the workshop verbal consent was obtained and it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw or choose not to answer any question at any time. As all participants were over 16 years, parental or carer consent was not required for young people.
- Workshops were recorded, with participants' consent. Only the research team had access to hear the recordings. Should the recordings be transcribed, transcripts will be anonymised and any identifying features will be changed to maintain confidentiality. Workshop recordings will be stored securely and destroyed once transcribed or six months after the completion of the project.
- The workshop topic is potentially sensitive for some young people. The facilitators were very experienced in working with young people respectfully, and well aware of vulnerabilities and duty of care within the workshop process. Processes were established with the young people to ensure they are supported both during and following the workshops, with ongoing communication with facilitators.
- In recognition of their time and contribution to the project, young people were given gift vouchers.

