



NCS Consultation Responses Analysis

Interim report

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Executive Summary

This report presents interim findings from a larger project 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. The report focuses specifically on the Scottish Government proposal to include children's services in an NCS and the implications of this for The Promise. It opens up the analytic space around this question, which constituted a small part of the overall Government consultation, by presenting an in-depth analysis of organisations' considerations around this issue. This report focuses on organisational responses directly referencing The Promise and the analysis is interwoven with findings from two workshops carried out with care experienced young people and professionals who support them.

The analysis suggests that organisations' views on the proposal to include children's services in an NCS are complex and nuanced. Around half of the responses analysed indicated it was not possible to say at this stage whether children's services should be included or presented a picture of both pros and cons of this proposal.

Five key themes were identified in responses to the proposal to include children's services in an NCS:

- Concerns about how the proposal had been developed and presented; a lack of information and clarity about the proposal, a lack of evidence about how this would benefit children and young people, and a lack of input from children, young people and those who support them.
- Issues around the value of a focus on wholesale structural change to create an NCS - and particularly how this might detract from the importance of achieving cultural change.
- Potentials for both integration and fragmentation of services - for example, that an NCS might bring vertical integration in terms of transition from children's to adult services but conversely lead to fragmentation horizontally across the range of interdependent services needed by children, such as education and housing.
- Implications for adult and children's services of including both in an NCS - in particular that expertise in children's services could 'get lost' in the broad scope of adults' services.
- The impact of an NCS on local delivery of services to children and families. While the aspiration of consistency in children's services across Scotland was appealing, in practice the impact on local relationships and local services to flexibly meet children's needs was felt likely to be detrimental.

A particular focus for this interim report is respondents' views on the impact of Scottish Government's proposal to incorporate children's services into an NCS on Scotland's commitment to #KeepThePromise. Two main themes were identified in respondents' views:

- That incorporating children's services into an NCS presents significant risks to derailing progress on The Promise.
- That the overall approach of The Promise, and particularly the importance of engaging with care experienced young people, was not being reflected in work to date on an NCS.

Whilst this is an interim report and the analysis is ongoing, comments of some organisations stand out in stating that a different question needs to be posed, not whether children's services should be included in the proposed NCS, but rather what needs to happen to create the best services and best outcomes for children, young people and families in Scotland. 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."

1. Introduction

This interim report presents the initial 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 is the first report from a project which has the overall aim to capture and learn from the views of individual and organisational 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 particular issues around the relationship between keeping The Promise and the possible creation of an NCS. As such, the analysis has centred on respondents and areas in the published consultation responses pertaining to children and families, and The Promise specifically. This interim report focuses on published responses from organisations that made direct reference to The Promise, looking specifically at the Scottish Government proposal to include children's services in the NCS.

This task is particularly valuable with a consultation as vast and cross-cutting as the NCS consultation. 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.

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.

2. Methodology

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 are briefly described below; see Appendix 1 for more detail.

¹ For more information on the consultation see [A National Care Service for Scotland – Scottish Government – Citizen Space \(consult.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/citizen-space/consultation) and for Scottish Government analysis of consultation responses see [National Care Service: consultation analysis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/national-care-service/consultation-analysis)

2.1 Analysis of published consultation responses

The aim of this project is to analyse the responses from a particular perspective – considering the opportunities and hindrances presented by an NCS to Scotland keeping The Promise. This interim report therefore considers only those published responses from organisations which directly reference The Promise in their response. 81 such organisational responses were identified (31 responses from individuals also directly reference the Promise and an analysis of these will be included in the final report). This interim report also focuses on a specific area of the consultation document, Scottish Government’s proposal to include children’s services in an NCS (chapter 3a). Material in the 81 organisational 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 will each meet three times to explore emergent findings from the analysis, with up to six participants in each workshop. For the purposes of this interim report, each group met separately for a 2-hour online workshop. Details of the workshops and ethical considerations are included in Appendix 1.

The analysis for the interim report was guided by the following questions:

- What are the key emerging themes in the responses about the proposal to include children’s services in the NCS?
- What themes are emerging specifically in relation to the Promise and the NCS proposal?
- How do responses to the NCS consultation argue that the NCS will help or hinder progress on the Promise?

The findings are presented in the following sections, including both the emerging themes from the analysis of responses and the engagement workshops.

3. Should the National Care Service include children’s social work and social care services?

Scottish Government proposed in the NCS consultation “that children’s social work and social care services should be located within the NCS” (p55). Consultation question 23, immediately following this proposal, asked respondents: **Should the National Care Service include both adults and children’s social work and social care services?** This consultation document provided ‘yes’ or ‘no’ tick-box options and an open text box ‘Please say why’ for elaboration.

The Scottish Government released the ‘National Care Service Consultation: Analysis of responses’ February 2022, which reported that 521 responses were made to this question; 373 individuals and

147 organisations. Of the organisational responses, Scottish Government reports that a clear majority (78%, 114 out of the 147) of those who responded to the question agreed that it should.

A focused consideration of responses from organisations who referred to the Promise offers a more nuanced analysis. It suggests that many organisations had responded to this question with positions that were more complex than a 'yes' or 'no' response could capture. As part of the task, to open up the analytic space around issues relating to children and the NCS consultation, a quantitative picture is provided of these more complex positions as a counterpoint to the Scottish Government analysis.

This issue was considered by 77 out of the 81 responses that were identified as having made direct reference to the Promise, at some point in their response. Those responses which did not use the questionnaire format of the consultation, but who engaged with this issue, were included in the analysis. 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'. The remaining 40 responses did not complete the tick-box; rather, they provided a narrative around this issue. The 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, pointing out potential benefits and risks (18 responses).

Table 1: Views on the issue of whether children's services should be included in the NCS.

View	# of Responses (n=77)
YES	18
NO	19
NOT POSSIBLE TO SAY	22
MIXED	18

This 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.

4. Key emerging themes about the proposal to include children's services in the National Care Service

The analysis of consultation responses from organisations that directly reference The Promise identified the following emerging themes in the responses:

- Concerns about the proposal as presented in the consultation document.
- The need for structural change and/or cultural change.
- Potential integration or fragmentation of services.
- Implications for adult and children’s services of including both in a National Care Service.
- The impact of a National Care Service on local delivery of services to children and families.

This section unpacks each of these themes in turn, looking at the key factors and issues that were highlighted, with quotes provided to illustrate main points. Woven through this is material from the workshops with care experienced young people and professionals who support them. The workshops were critically important in grounding the analysis in the experience of young people and professionals, with participants raising a range of issues that closely aligned with themes emerging from the responses.

The themes identified in the analysis are all inter-related, with areas of convergence and overlap between these. Just as children’s lives are not siloed, neither are the contexts in which services are delivered. However, for the purposes of reporting, the key considerations that were apparent in the responses are delineated in relation to each of the themes.

4.1 Concerns about the proposal as presented in the consultation document

Many responses conveyed concerns about the proposal as it was presented in the consultation document. These concerns primarily related to three areas: not enough information in the proposal; lack of supporting evidence; and the exclusion of children and young people’s voices, and the voices of those who support them. These areas contributed to respondents’ ability to comment on whether children’s services should be included in the NCS or not, with some responses noting that it was concerning that an issue as important as integrating services was presented in such a binary fashion, requiring a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. Some responses argued that the question being asked in the proposal was not the correct one to be asking.

“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)

4.1.1 Lack of information

A key concern noted in some responses was that the proposal to include children was not yet fully defined. 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. It was also reflected in comments that the information in the consultation was “too vague” and “lacking clarity”.

“The proposal within the consultation for including children’s services is lacking real detail, sufficient information or an articulated vision for what children’s services could look like if they were located with the NCS.” (Aberlour Child Care Trust)

“The lack of detail in the proposals hamper our ability to fully understand the consequences of the proposed change on vulnerable groups.” (Community Planning Aberdeen)

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.

The Children and Young People’s Commissioner’s response pointed to a serious gap, in process as well as information, in 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.² The response from the Children and Young People’s Commissioner 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”. The call for a CRIA to be undertaken was echoed by several other organisations.

“CHS would welcome a National Care Service (NCS) that includes both [adults] and children’s services if it results in more integrated improved provision to children and families that consistently upholds and enhances children’s rights and results in better outcomes. Currently there is limited detail or evidence to reach a definitive position in relation to this complex question. A detailed children’s right impact assessment process, that fully involved children and young people, their families and organisations that support them would help assess the impact of the proposed NCS on advancing children’s rights.” (Children’s Hearings Scotland)

“It is imperative that the following actions are carried out if children’s services are to be included in the National Care Service: A Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment of the National Care Service consultation should be completed.” (The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland)

4.1.2 Lack of evidence

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. Some responses noted that the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (IRASC), which provided the recommendations for establishment of an NCS, did not include children’s services and questioned why Scottish Government had extended beyond those recommendations to include children’s services in the proposal.

“... the rationale for extending the scope of a National Care Service to oversee all age groups and a wider range of needs appears limited to the perceived

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-wellbeing-impact-assessment-guidance/pages/3/>

opportunities for standardisation and consistency. This is not a compelling reason and it would seem irrational, having commissioned the IRASC to examine the future delivery of Adult Social Care, to include service areas for which there is no equivalent evidence base.” (Scottish Borders Council)

“The Independent Review of Adult Social Care did not consider the issues relating to children’s social work and social care services and no recommendations were forthcoming in the Review Report. It is therefore more than a little surprising to us that this proposal has come forward at such a late stage without a detailed and independent analysis of how such a change would directly benefit and improve outcomes for children and young people requiring children’s social care.” (The Fostering Network)

Further, some responses pointed to the consultation that took place as part of the Independent Care Review. This Review involved listening to over 5,500 children, young people, parents, workers and services, and resulted in the Promise made by Scottish Government to care experienced children and young people. Some responses noted that the recommendations made by the Independent Care Review did not include establishment of an NCS.

Several responses also 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. In this vein, an argument was put forward by COSLA that there was plenty of evidence about delivery of children’s services from work underway in Local Authorities.

“Whilst there is no evidence base for the inclusion of children’s services in a National Care Service, there is a bank of evidence both showing the commitment of Local Authorities to making positive changes to the way they deliver services for children and families and progress towards this goal. All 32 Local Authorities have fully committed to the full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, 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)

4.1.3 The rights of care experienced children and young people to engage and participate in decisions and change that affect them.

Some local government and third sector organisations made explicit reference to children’s right to participate and be heard in matters that affect them and Scotland’s obligations with the incorporation of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scottish law.

“COSLA is particularly concerned that the consultation does not set out what children and young people have said they want – this is critical to set the context of what children’s social care should look like in Scotland. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which is currently being incorporated into Scottish law, states that every child has the right to express themselves freely in all matters that relate to them (Article 12). Children and young people are experts in what their support should look like, and the consultation does not tell us what they have said.” (COSLA)

“It is of great concern that the government is proposing structural change of this magnitude on the basis of a review completed within three months and with no “voice” of children or our communities or those with professional knowledge and

experience of delivering services for children ... The voices of our communities using these services is missing from the consultation paper's proposals – a glaring omission given the adoption of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and the commitments made through The Promise.” (East Lothian Council)

“As has been recognised by the UN Secretary-General, it is essential that children’s rights are mainstreamed into a human rights based approach. Children and young people must be able to actively participate in the design of any National Care Service, whether children’s services are included at the beginning or not. It is not appropriate for children to be slotted into a service designed by and for adults at some later date.” (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland)

After their concerns about a lack of detail about how the NCS will actually work, participants in the young people’s engagement workshop 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 workshop.

Over a third of responses highlighted, that the voices and perspectives of children and young people were missing from the consultation document and not evident in the development of the proposal for children’s services.

“Barnardo’s Scotland is concerned that the evidence underpinning the consultation relies on the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (IRASC), which did not consider or include the voices and experiences of children and young people or the services that support them. We believe that if children’s services are to be included within the NCS, we must ensure that ... services are co-designed and co-produced with children and families who use them.” (Barnardo’s Scotland)

As well as the voices and perspectives of children and young people being excluded, some responses also pointed to the missing voices of those professionals and practitioners who work with and support children and young people. Not only was this seen as a crucial gap in the evidence to support change, it was also seen by some as indicating a lack of valuing of children’s services and posited as potentially impacting on engagement with the NCS once established.

“AFA Scotland believes that the timescales for consultation and implementation of the NCS do not provide enough time for full consideration within the children’s services sector of the proposals and engagement with children and families in developing the NCS. There is a risk that the resulting organisational change becomes ‘top-down’ and runs contrary to the Promise.” (Adoption & Fostering Alliance Scotland)

Across a range of organisations, including third sector, local government and public bodies, 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 organisational values and principles, such as rights-based practice and co-design with those who are engaged with using or working in the system.

“A National Care Service cannot be built without the participation of those who rely on and work in social care. Without this, the result may be a service which, rather than improving services, unintentionally reinforces existing challenges and fails to deliver the innovation and transformational change the government hopes to achieve.” (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland)

“We have additional concerns about what has informed the inclusion of children’s services within the NCS consultation proposal. We welcome that the proposal has been informed by the participation of those who use and who benefit from adult social care services, and other key stakeholders ... Participation in this process of those whom the NCS intends to benefit is a crucial element of delivering a rights-based service. However, the absence of any similar exercise supporting the participation of children, young people and families, as well as those organisations that deliver children’s services, is hugely problematic and fails to provide a legitimate rationale for including children’s services within the proposal at all.” (Aberlour Child Care Trust)

4.1.4 Call for further consultation and review

Given the range of concerns about the proposal in its current form it is perhaps unsurprising that some responses have called for a pause, to allow further consultation and review, before moving ahead with any changes.

“The ‘yes/no’ response option to the inclusion of children’s services in the NCS implies that there are no other options for, or pathways to reform. The consultation document itself acknowledges in relation to justice social work, that the NCS could evolve over time, incorporating other elements if the evidence base supports this. A pause to allow time for proper consideration of the evidence for inclusion or otherwise of children’s services, and what structures best facilitate coordinated and inclusive practice for children and their families is therefore required.” (Scottish Association of Social Workers)

“The conclusions reached in the IRASC report underpin a wide range of improvement proposals yet the proposed inclusion of children’s services was not intimated prior to the publication of the consultation document and therefore has not benefitted from the diligence of a formal review. Such a significant extension to the scope of proposals must be subject to a full review in its own right before any decision on inclusion can be reached.” (SOLACE)

4.2 The need for structural change and/or cultural change

The prospect of structural change was addressed by many responses in a variety of ways. This includes the consideration of the need for structural change (or not) and the need for a period of stability (or not). Some responses argued that cultural change was more important than structural change to improve outcomes for children and families, and where energy and resources should be focused.

4.2.1 Questioning the need for structural change right now

Some responses indicated that structural change was not needed or called for. 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

given the upheaval that had been created by the pandemic and that further disruption would likely be caused by such change. Several local government body responses drew on a recent report by Children in Scotland to highlight that “a period of stability is essential”.

“There is no evidence that including Children’s Services in a National Care Service and the associated disruption that structural reform would cause would be of benefit to children and young people. As a recent report from Children in Scotland, commissioned by Social Work Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate highlighted that the answer to ‘the delivery of more effective children’s services is not more structural change. A period of stability is essential’.” (SOLACE; COSLA; Clackmannanshire Council)³

“Our members have questioned the rationale for implementing a large new structural change at a time when so many families and support services across the statutory and third sector are struggling to cope as we recover from the Covid 19 pandemic. Many feel that improving practice within existing mechanisms would be the more beneficial than trying to make significant structural change to the system.” (Children in Scotland)

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’. While some participants 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 they felt 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.

Some organisations, particularly local government bodies, noted work that was currently underway. Existing structures and services that are working well or have required considerable investment were highlighted to argue that change was not needed and would potentially disrupt the good work that was happening.

“The focus should be on delivering better outcomes through the Promise rather than structural change. When IJBs were formed it took a couple of years for the system to settle, we cannot afford to delay the national care review and fail our young people. Work is ongoing locally to implement the I-Promise [Inverclyde’s Promise] and recovery from Covid 19 is paramount. Structural changes at this time will not be helpful as the focus moves to structures rather than delivering the Promise.” (Inverclyde Council)

“East Lothian Council has committed significant resources to support the implementation of the education and children’s services directorate, in recognition of the need – as set out by Christie to invest in preventive approaches - to reduce vulnerability and meet children’s needs at the earliest opportunity. Furthermore, the council has launched a transformation of services for children programme and is undertaking a whole-service redesign of children’s social work, in line with the Promise, and will further strengthen the relationship with education, housing and third sector community-based services. For East Lothian, this proposal risks

³ Note, the paragraph quoted was included in the responses from each of the organisations named – SOLACE, COSLA and Clackmannanshire Council.

significantly undermining what we have achieved and have planned is right within our context and our communities.” (East Lothian Council)

Additionally, responses from across the stakeholder groups indicated that structural change alone was not sufficient to address the challenges and barriers faced by children and families. Social Work Scotland, for example, highlighted a number of contextual factors that will continue to constrain and influence outcomes within new structures, including differing professional cultures, the relative strength of local partnerships, tensions between the priorities of difference services, leadership, availability of local resources and community deprivation levels.

“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)

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 uncertainty for staff, and direct organisational capacity and attention away from existing services for people.

“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 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)

Other things, such as leadership, local partnerships and connections, were seen as being more important than structural change.

“Evidence from the Care Inspectorate’s programme of inspection demonstrates that it is the quality and strength of collaborative leadership and direction that has the biggest impact on outcomes and not the structures.” (Midlothian Council)

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

“Emerging learning from the pandemic has exposed a number of enabling factors that support families, services and systems to keep safe. These include 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. It is unclear from the proposals how any of these enabling factors would be enhanced by structural reform.” (Quarriers)

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.

4.2.2 Greater need for cultural change

There appears to be agreement that some kind of reform of children's services is needed, however, responses from third sector organisations and public bodies, along with local government, emphasised that the focus needed to be on cultural change, rather than structural change. In particular, responses highlighted the 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.

“Ultimately the biggest risk in including children’s services within the NCS is the potential to prioritise structural change over cultural change. Barnardo’s Scotland is committed to implementing The Promise and we are already engaged in a range of work internally and with our partner organisations to make the necessary changes that will achieve culture change, to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up, feeling safe, loved and respected.” (Barnardo’s Scotland)

“Large scale structural change and reorganisation requires substantial resource but is unlikely to deliver the relational and cultural change that is required for children and families.” (Parenting across Scotland)

“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)

Within the context of seeking cultural change and working to deliver on the Promise, some organisational responses pointed to the importance of relational practice with children and families. A component of this also noted was recognising 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.

“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)

“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)

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.

4.3 Potential integration or fragmentation of services

A key emerging theme in the responses is the potential for inclusion of children’s services in the NCS to lead to better integration of services, or conversely, to increase fragmentation of services. These responses have been considered in terms of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ integration. ‘Horizontal’ being better integration of services for children, young people and families that need to access a range of services in the same period of time, and ‘vertical’ service integration, across life stages, with a particular emphasis on the opportunities the NCS might offer for more seamless transitions between child and adult services. Some responses considered aspects of both horizontal and vertical integration of services, while others focused on one or the other.

“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)

4.3.1 Potential for better vertical integration of 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. 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 gap’.

“Many people with learning disabilities have reported poor experiences of moving from children’s services to adult services. Many of these harmful experiences result from poor communications between the two service systems. We are supportive of children’s social work and social care being included because of the benefits of an

all-age system that increases the chances of a smooth transition into adulthood for young people.” (Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities)

“This would provide a holistic service that captures the current service provisions to children and adults from both social work and social care. It would streamline pathways for young people who require extra support when transitioning from child to adult services. It is also anticipated that this could prevent young people falling through the gap.” (Police Scotland)

“We can see the benefit of including children’s social work and social care in the National Care Service because at times the current system can be disjointed. This can make transitions more challenging and some young people can ‘fall between the gaps’ when moving from one team to another. Some SLTs have seen young people can fall into the gaps as they are deemed ‘too young’ for adult services and ‘too old’ for children’s services. The change could improve information sharing and could avoid families having to retell their story multiple times.” (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists)

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 which were not always 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.

Responses from some third sector organisations focused primarily 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.

4.3.2 Potential for better horizontal integration of services if children’s services included in the NCS

Some third sector organisation responses pointed to the potential of the NCS to provide better integration of services for children, which would be of particular benefit for those who are most vulnerable, children with disabilities and children involved in the justice system. Integration of services would reduce siloed working and increase cohesion of services, improving coordination and movement of children and families between these. A few responses suggested that the NCS provides potential for a universal (or more unified) service approach, which would help alleviate the stigma of asking for help.

“Locating children’s social work and care services within the National Care Service could result in more seamless, consistent support, with less regional variation and implementation gaps in applying legislative rights. There is also scope for greater consistency relating to policies, service delivery and assessments, evidenced in the following comments from within our survey:

“Stronger working across different departments to allow a better understanding, and ultimately a better service.” (SASW Survey respondent).

“It would break down the barrier between services and hopefully improve transitions.” (SASW Survey respondent).”

(Scottish Association of Social Work)

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.

Another theme emerging from organisations that work with children in public bodies and the third sector 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 recommendations from the Independent Care Review and the call in the Promise for provision of whole family support and indicated that this could be a positive outcome of the proposed changes. Professionals also recognised how the NCS could, depending on how it was structured, better enable whole family support approaches, ensuring, for example that parents with mental health or substance misuse needs had better access to the supports. However, 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.

“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)

“We welcome the recognition of the interconnects of social work and social care. We recognise that the provision of children’s social work and social care services is inextricably linked to that for adults. We also recognise that children are part of families, often requiring support in their own right, grow into adults (at times requiring services through this transition or subsequently) and that the provision of holistic family support is a key component of the Promise. Therefore, the principles of adult social care, children and families social care, justice and health being aligned makes sense.” (Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice)

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. The lack of detail, noted earlier, contributed to some responses acknowledging the intention and aspirations, and in some cases aligning this with the aims of GIRFEC and the Promise, but not fully embracing the proposal, despite the potential benefits. Other responses expressed reservations about whether an NCS was the best way to achieve support for families.

“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)

“The principles of joining up and integrating services seems positive and appropriate, but the lack of detail at this stage makes it challenging to see how the vision for this would look in practice.” (Edinburgh Young Carers)

“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)

“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)

4.3.3 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. Consistency was also linked in some responses with accessibility, such that an NCS would ensure the same service delivery model, with the same access requirements across Scotland.

“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)

“The provisions of social work and social care go hand in hand and the introduction of an NCS would make all services more accessible. It is a complex landscape and there will be a need to introduce robust triage processes to facilitate quicker and more effective responses that would incorporate the full needs of a child and their family.” (Police Scotland)

“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)

Some third sector organisations were 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)

While recognising the potential of service integration for enhanced accessibility, several 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)

“More efficient access to services would be welcomed. This is particularly true in relation to CAMHS. Specialist help, at the time of crisis, is lacking particularly for our looked after young people.” (The Highland Council)

“Young people with complex needs have to be guaranteed that the right services they require are available to them at the right time from the right people in line with Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and The Promise.” (St Philips Residential School)

Both young people and professionals in the workshops highlighted the need for more specialist child and youth services, not less. Young people 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. They wondered if children’s services expertise would be lost in a larger service primarily aimed at adults. Professionals wondered what would happen to helpful specialism 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.

4.3.4 Risk of fragmentation of services that support children and families

While responses identified potential benefits of integrated services for children, young people and families, there were also concerns expressed that including children’s services in the proposed NCS would result in fragmentation of children’s services along horizontal lines. Particular concern was expressed about separating children’s care services from education. Children’s lives are not siloed and responses from some organisations that engage with children, young people and families, 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.

“The Independent Care Review struggled to define the care system as it recognised children’s services were interdependent. Part of growing up means involvement in lots of services, especially education. If social work and social care services joined the NCS there is a real risk of losing positive working relationships with colleagues in education and other partners. This could lead to a more fragmented service for children rather than the consistent approach envisaged in a NCS.” (National Youth Justice Advisory Group)

“We recognise that there are risks in continuing with the current arrangements. There is a strong argument that if there is to be transformative change, children’s services need to be included. To separate children’s social work/social care from adult social work/social care risks creating increased divisions and further disadvantage families. However, the potential for lost opportunities for integrated approaches with education and other local authority functions, such as leisure and housing for looked after children, needs to be considered, plus the creation of additional barriers in giving effect to corporate parenting responsibilities.” (Care Inspectorate)

As well as concerns about fragmentation along horizontal lines, there was also concern expressed about transitions for young people. Responses from local authorities also 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. East Lothian Council, for example, points to the critical importance of housing, education and employment for care experienced young people.

“It should also be acknowledged that children making transitions from child to adult services in social care will also be moving on, and potentially requiring support, in other areas of their lives. This may include for example, support with gaining access to employment, training, volunteering, further and higher education and other services such as housing, transport and recreation. As children move into these adult services and support is required to do so Local Authority provision plays a co-ordinating role. Moving children's services into the National Care Service risks disconnecting them from other support young people may need during the transition phase but also simply moving the challenge of transition into the NCS rather than resolving it.” (COSLA)

“Housing and education and employment services are critical in transitions for care experienced young people. Successful delivery of the Promise is predicated on enabling children to live within safe home settings and communities where they can achieve positive outcomes in preparation for a successful transition to adulthood. Whilst access to adult mental health and substance use services will be important, this is unlikely to take precedence over access to integrated community mental health and whole family substance use services that need to be available throughout childhood and accessible within universal education services.” (East Lothian Council)

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. The argument is made that the proposed changes will see further fragmentation of the existing important partnerships and service relationships.

“The establishment of IJB's resulted in structural fragmentation. Adult social care was delegated to the IJB to enable alignment and integration with adult health care services. Included within the transfer of adult social care was the specialist social work services of adult protection and criminal justice. This resulted in a fracturing of what had previously been an integrated social work service comprising both adults and children's which itself made the “whole family” model easier. Following the creation of IJBs, the social work service was split. The remaining children's social work services have subsequently become more integrated with the universal education and health services for children. In recognition of the fractured lines created by the creation of the original IJBs, there has been an increasing policy focus from Scottish Government on whole family models ... Now this consultation proposes that children's social work should transfer to the national care service. This will inevitably create another fracture line between children's social work services and universal education and health services for children. 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. If latest research demonstrates the benefits of whole family approaches, then we need organisational structures which facilitate that approach rather than hinder it. (Aberdeen City Council & Community Planning Aberdeen) [Underline added for emphasis]

“There is more connection and engagement with the universal services in schools and early years education by children and families social work than there is with adult services. Many of these are embedded in integrated education and children’s services structures with local authorities. The net benefits of removing children and families social work services from local authorities appear even less clear than those indicated for adult social work. If the statement in the consultation document that this would be overcome by strengthening the links with education and early years holds true, the same could be said for leaving the function where it is and strengthen the links with adult services! Similar arguments can be made for the proposals for community justice services and the close links with other council services.” (SOLACE)

4.4 Implications for adult and children’s services of including both in a National Care Service

Responses recognised the connectedness between adult and children’s services. 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)

“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)

4.4.1 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.

“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)

“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)

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.

“There are significant differences between adults and children’s social work and social care, with a case-management approach predominating within adult’s social work in contrast to the relationship-based approach aspired to within children’s services.” (Adoption & Fostering Alliance)

“Should this proposal be adopted, the utmost care should be exercised to safeguard the particular rights of children in terms of their social work needs, as they are in a minority when larger vulnerable groups of adults are vying for resources ...There is the potential for loss of the child specific elements of health and social care, their changing needs with age and developmental status, and their dependency on adults for care and advocacy ... Children and young people services may be at risk of becoming the poor relation within a national service that is dominated by adult care service needs.” (Children’s Health Scotland)

Some responses noted that the proposal to include children’s services seemed secondary to the main proposal focused on adult social care, described by UNISON Scotland as ‘feeling rushed and a slightly opportunistic “bolt-on” to the core IRASC project’. The Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration clearly articulated a concern, which permeated some of the other responses, that the approach being taken to the inclusion of children’s services suggested the ‘secondary’ place these would have in a combined service.

“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)

“The consultation document does not place value on Children’s Services, it does not include the voice of Children’s Social Work or Children’s Services. The focus is on Adults.” (Northern Alliance)

4.4.2 The pressure of an ageing population competing for resources

Organisations pointed to Scotland having an ageing population, which will increase demand for social care services over time. This was of a particular concern to some organisations in relation to The Promise. Organisations raised concerns that, at the same time as demand would be increasing in volume terms for adult services, 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)

The pressure of an ageing population was also considered in some responses, across all stakeholder groups, to pose a risk to children’s services with regard to the allocation of funding and resources. Of particular note, is the concern shared by many organisations that support children, and echoed in responses from some local authorities, that children’s services would be deprioritised as funding was directed to meet demand for adult care.

“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)

4.4.3 Potential negative impact on adult social care

The responses of some organisations that cater for children and adults highlighted that the proposal to establish an NCS came about through the need to reform adult social care. A need which was identified during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently reinforced in the IRASC, leading to the recommendation to establish an NCS. These responses argued that the focus should be on adult social care, with consideration of including children’s services a distraction that could potentially have a negative impact.

“CCPS is mindful that from the perspective of The Promise, the proposals risk distraction, and a dilution of focus on that change programme. By the same token we are concerned that they risk a dilution of focus on reforming adult social care at the very moment it appeared at last to have gained momentum. This creates the potential for a double whammy which would be detrimental to care & support for both children and adults.” (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland)

4.5 The 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. Potential advantages of national standardised services were noted, but so too were concerns that this would impact negatively on local partnerships and initiatives which were working well to meet children and family’s needs.

“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)

4.5.1 Ensure consistent delivery of services to the most vulnerable children and families across 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 need for consistency across geographical areas was particularly noted for children and families in rural areas who can have difficulties accessing resources. Reference was also made to families who move between areas, as well as those who live in different locations.

“Welcome initiatives such as continuing care are inconsistently interpreted and implemented across the country and an NCS may provide for fairer application of such policies and reduce the ‘postcode lottery’.” (Adoption & Fostering Alliance Scotland)

“Locating children’s social work and care services within the National Care Service could result in more seamless, consistent support, with less regional variation and implementation gaps in applying legislative rights.” (Scottish Association of Social Workers)

“In addition to a more coherent policy framework it is likely to be more achievable to have consistency in the application of legislative and regulatory requirements across the country as part of a NCS. This in turn is likely to achieve a higher level of consistency for those families who move between areas or indeed those families who live in different geographical locations ... For a small but significant number of children who have highly specialist needs securing the right service can be very challenging. This is one area where scale may well be a catalyst for service development and innovation that is not possible from an individual Local Authority perspective.” (Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership)

Young people and professionals who took part in the first workshops also wondered if an NCS could reduce the ‘post code 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 postcode lottery. Several responses pointed to significant variation around the country in existing healthcare provisions delivered through NHS Scotland services. Social Work Scotland, for example, noted that some NHS services are available in some areas and not in others, and the quality of services differs from place to place. Further, Social Work Scotland, who developed their response following extensive engagement with their Board, members and partners, highlighted contextual factors which they believe will continue to constrain and influence outcomes within new structures and concluded that local differences are likely to remain whatever structures are put in place.

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. They 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.

Some responses expressed hopes that if children's services were included in an NCS with greater accountability to Scottish Ministers and Government, that this may facilitate improved consistency and quality.

“Crucial to the way forward is ... Acknowledgement of the variation of priority given to children's services across the country within the existing structures and that greater Scottish Government accountability may facilitate progress towards consistency of service offer and quality between local areas.” (Social Work Scotland)

4.5.2 Potential impact of inclusion of children's services in a National Care Service on local partnerships and ongoing local initiatives

Many responses from third sector organisations and public bodies expressed concern about a possible negative impact on established and ongoing local partnerships and initiatives that currently support children and families well. Local partnerships and services were recognised in some responses as having the required local knowledge, and being flexible and creative in responding to the needs of children and families who need support. Concern was expressed that by moving social work and social care out of local authorities the relationships established with other services, such as early years, education, housing and third sector providers would be threatened or fractured, and accessing services involve greater complexity and bureaucracy for children, young people and families.

“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)

“The inclusion of children's services (which have yet to be fully defined in the consultation) may prove a risk to the delivery of localised, bespoke services which meet the needs of some groups. Current provision within each of the 32 local authorities allows greater flexibility to deliver local, bespoke, tailored services. We recognise the risks of centralisation, including the deviation away from crucial community-based services, loss of flexibility, adaptability and involvement of voluntary organisations which is far less stigmatising than would be the case under NCS intervention.” (Children and Young People's Centre for Justice)

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.

Local authorities too expressed concern about centralisation of social work and social care services within an NCS and Community Health and Social Care Boards. East Lothian Council, for example, said that this presented a real risk that local need, local context and local initiatives could be lost. They

outlined, in their response, the decision taken to not include children's services within the East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership, but to recently move them into a combined Education and Children's Service. This decision was taken "because we see the value of even closer working between these two aligned services in order to achieve the desired outcomes to meet the principles of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)."

"Accepting there is not consistency of practice across Scotland, this is not the way to try and implement this, there needs to be the ability to respond to local demographics, needs and to offer support as and when required, not via a national model or structure." (Midlothian Council)

"As a Regional Improvement Collaborative, we understand that local authority colleagues are the 'experts' in knowing their context – their children, families and communities. We have a role to play regionally by 'adding value' to local authority improvement activity through collaboration. By moving to a national perspective, that local expertise and connectedness may be diluted – or even lost." (Northern Alliance)

Other councils also expressed concerns, including 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)

Along with the clear assertion from local authorities that the best way to deliver services is locally, responses also spoke to the negative impact that the proposed changes could have on work currently underway.

"There is clear evidence that organisational change is driving improvement in outcomes and in culture across Aberdeen City. There is a very real risk that the removal of children's social work could compromise the improvement in outcomes and culture made across the city. There is anecdotal evidence from other Local Authorities that separating children's social work and education will damage relationships and undermine the emphasis on prevention and early intervention. It could inadvertently lead to children escalating through the care system causing lifelong trauma." (Community Planning Aberdeen)

"There are two main structures across the Northern Alliance for Children's Social Work either in with Education or within the IJB. These models are appreciated as they have been developed to meet the local circumstances and context. The proposed change will have a monumental impact at a time when approaches are being refined to deliver on The Promise." (Northern Alliance)

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 relationship and respond in creative ways to families in distress.

Locally based services, rather than a centralised system, was also seen by third sector organisations and some public bodies to be more congruent with the whole family support approach, as called for in the Promise, and mentioned earlier.

“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)

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)

“It also fails to recognise the rich diversity of provision. There is no better example of this than the position of rural authorities. It is very clear that what will work well in a large urban authority will not necessarily be an approach that would be adopted in an Island authority. Local multi-agency decision making and accountability must be retained to ensure that the needs of children and families in rural and Island authorities are fully addressed.” (COSLA)

5 Key emerging themes in relation to the Promise and the proposal to include children’s services in the NCS

A particular interest for this project was capturing respondents’ views of the impact of including children’s services in an NCS on Scotland’s commitment to #KeepThePromise. There is considerable overlap between the consultation and the Promise in terms of areas of interest. However, the consultation does not engage substantively with the content of the Promise, referring to it briefly in two subsections in the consultation document within Chapter 3, Scope of the National Care Service; i) Children’s services, and ii) Social Work and Social Care. Neither is there any engagement with the Independent Care Review, which underpins the Promise.

A number of respondents expressed surprise about the lack of interaction between the consultation and the Promise and also the importance of aligning the NCS with the Promise.

“The Promise should be a key part of the design of a new National Care Service (if it is to include children’s social work and social care services), and the outcomes and findings from the Promise should be at the forefront of these discussions.” (Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans).

“The findings of Scotland’s Independent Care Review, The Promise Scotland’s Plan 21-24 and Change Programme ONE, set out a collective vision and the key areas for change required to improve the lives of all children and families across Scotland with a target date of 2030. Without reference to these elements in the consultation, a valid question remains about how far this vision and its significant areas of change and improvement would be prioritised within a new National Care Service.” (CELCIS)

The number of organisational responses that made direct reference to the Promise (81 responses), across a range of stakeholder groups, points to a strong awareness across public and third sector groups engaging with children, young people and families. Of these responses, 69 made substantive reference to the Promise in relation to the proposal to include children’s services in an NCS, with some highlighting the commitment that has been made to implementing the Promise from third sector, local government and other public bodies.

“Making a success of such significant organisational change requires substantial ‘buy in’ from the children’s social work and social care sector. The Promise has achieved such ‘buy in’ and provides incremental change plans as to how its recommendations will be implemented over the next decade.” (Adoption and Fostering Association)

The following emerging themes were identified in the analysis of those 69 responses.

5.1 Risk of derailing work toward keeping the Promise

The most 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.

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)

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).

5.1.1 Transformational change is already underway

Responses from third sector organisations and local public bodies pointed strongly to the substantial work already underway toward implementing the Promise and the importance of this continuing. Both organisations in favour of inclusion of children’s services in an NCS and those with concerns

about it, highlighted the importance of not losing the focus on transformational work being implemented around the Promise.

“Furthermore, the council has launched a transformation of services for children programme and is undertaking a whole-service redesign of children’s social work, in line with the Promise, and will further strengthen the relationship with education, housing and third sector community-based services... The Promise requires transformational change and we are already over half way through year one of the 21-24 Plan. The required transformation straddles a ten-year plan against which we are making significant strides.” (East Lothian Council)

“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)

5.1.2 Local delivery best for keeping the Promise

As indicated in an earlier section, responses across the range of stakeholder groups drew on the Promise to emphasise the importance of responsive community-based services. This included highlighting the key role of third sector organisations and local partnerships in providing a locally coordinated whole family support approach.

“The Promise acknowledged that the changes in culture, working practices as well as the collective approach to risk would be best delivered at a local level. “Leadership based on a broader understanding of risk is critical.” In Aberdeen there is strong support for The Promise, which is allowing us to challenge traditional siloed ways of working and enable a coming together of local partners to improve the outcomes for children, young people, and their families.” (Aberdeen City Council)

This was also reflected in the workshop discussions. Examples of innovative, creative and responsive service delivery currently underway were discussed. Participants wondered if the NCS would support this to develop further.

5.2 The vision provided by the Promise is not reflected in the NCS proposal

There was a clear sense in some of the responses that organisations and public bodies have engaged with the vision for transformational change set out in the Promise. At times referred to in aspirational terms, it speaks to the ethos of the service that is to be delivered, the focus, practices and relationships, and goes well beyond the service establishment or delivery itself. Some responses were clear that if an NCS was established that did not incorporate and prioritise this vision, then successful delivery of the Promise would be unlikely.

“The Promise gives the aspiration, vision and strategic direction for Children’s Services. It is not clear how a National Care Service will help us deliver The Promise.” (Northern Alliance)

“Social workers state that a vision for children’s services already exists with The Promise, which re-invigorated the sector by focussing on relationship-based practice. A NCS must embed this vision.” (Scottish Association of Social Workers)

“The document generally appears to be based on a traditional (medical model) of professionals giving families what they need, as opposed to working alongside families to meet their needs and seeing families as experts in their own lives. This is in stark contrast to the philosophy of the Promise in relation to Children’s Services and the strategic direction of HSCPs across the country.” (Glasgow City Integration Joint Board)

Professionals also spoke about the challenges organisations were facing in translating the aspirations of the Promise into tangible change and the setbacks created by the pandemic in this important work. They worried that further change during the implementation of a NCS could be a further setback.

5.2.1 Risk of undermining confidence of those who contributed to the Independent Care Review

Responses also noted the significant contribution that had been made to the Independent Care Review, which led to the Promise, by care experienced children, young people, families and organisations, and the importance of keeping faith with that. 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.

“Risk that the delivery of The Promise will be derailed by upheaval of organisation change to establish an NCS. Any delay would risk undermining the confidence of the care experienced children and young people and their families who so generously contributed to the work of the ICR/Promise Team.” (Community Planning Aberdeen)

“The work of The Promise is based on a huge consultation, reflection and feedback methodology with care experienced young people and buy in from the constituent partners and organisations involved in change. Losing all of this would be a huge mistake and loss of an enormous amount of effort and time to build trust and confidence.” (Cyrenians)

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.

6 Conclusion

The responses analysed for this interim report, those of organisations who directly referred to the Promise, provide a wealth of insight into the potential opportunities and risks posed by the Scottish Government proposal to include children’s social care and social work services in an NCS. Hearing the voices of care experienced young people and the professionals who support them, in the engagement workshops, was essential in grounding these findings in real experience.

The focus in this report, on organisations' responses around the issue of whether children's social care and social work should be included in an NCS, has highlighted the complexity of this question. Organisations have identified a wide range of potential opportunities and significant challenges to this proposal. Without more clarity and detail on how the inclusion of children's services in an NCS would work in practice, organisations have indicated it is difficult to say, with any confidence, whether this proposal would benefit children and young people. The analysis findings have also highlighted the need for proposals to meaningfully engage with the Promise, its vision and ethos. A key message from third sector organisations who engage with children and young people, and from some public bodies and local authorities who deliver children's services, is that this vision is integral to transformational work that is underway. It underpins, for example, the drive towards incorporating rights-based and relationship-based practices into services.

Some of the responses have suggested that the consultation is, in fact, not asking the right question; 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 seem more aligned with the commitment Scottish Government has made to #KeepThePromise that every child grows up loved, safe and respected, able to realise their full potential. It would also enable Government to hear more clearly where children, young people and the people and organisations who work with and support them believe the best opportunities for service reform lies.

To conclude, some words from 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

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 in this interim report. Specifically, this interim report focuses on Chapter 3a of the consultation document, Scottish Government’s proposal to include children’s services in the establishment of an NCS. A subset of responses, those from organisations which directly reference The Promise in their response, have been analysed for this interim report.

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, e.g. 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). An analysis of the individual responses will be included in the final report.

Responses from the 81 identified organisations were recorded on a spreadsheet, then mapped to classify the type of organisation, and where and how they have referenced #KeepThePromise in their response.

The data set analysed for this interim report consisted of text from organisational responses to Chapter 3a of the consultation document. 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 will each meet three times to explore emergent findings from the analysis, with up to six participants in each workshop.

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

The focus of the workshop was 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.

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.