



Plan 24-30

An update

Planning

It's the time of year for planning. [Programme for Government](#) was published in early September, and Budget 2024-25 is on the horizon.

Part of my job is thinking about the next planning cycle for Scotland to #KeepThePromise. I do that, knowing that while [Plan 21-24](#) has done much to drive progress, not all the actions set out across the five priority areas will be fully met by the end of next March.

So, how to ensure Plan 24-30 collectively builds on positive change and momentum, captures and shares learning, and unlocks the barriers to change? Early in the summer, I outlined an initial approach to its development and sought feedback.

What I've heard

The responses received to the questions asked, alongside broader conversations, have confirmed what's already known: keeping the promise must be a collective effort; there continues to be a need for much greater collaboration in order to prioritise and drive practice and culture change nationally and locally; and the funding and governance 'landscape' needs decluttering.

I've also heard that while Plan 21-24 clarified priorities, it wasn't specific enough about which organisations must do what, by when – and that Plan 24-30 needs to be much more explicit in assigning clear roles and responsibilities, and setting out milestones.

Respondents were clear that a single shared strategy is needed to make sure Scotland keeps the promise by 2030. One with specificity whilst maintaining a degree of flexibility to ensure the 'system' responds appropriately to the needs of children and families as they change over the six years.

So, a six-year plan is a good idea, but only if funding is longer term to support it, and milestones are frequent and clear.

Funding challenges continue to dominate

In terms of the challenges that have to be overcome, difficulties around finance and governance continue to dominate.

[The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund](#) was announced in the [2021-22 Programme for Government](#), published a few months after Plan 21-24, and whilst welcomed and working in some areas, funding has not been at the quantum, nor had the impact desired.

To date, the Fund has not supported the much hoped-for unlocking of whole family approaches across Scotland, nor enabled a shift towards prevention to become the way of working that children and families need, and the system longs to deliver.

However, the problems are not simply about the lack of funds.

The disparate distribution routes and reporting lines, the out-of-sync timescales that reflect policy silos, and the nature of short-term commitments are all challenges.

Local partnerships and areas struggle to plan for services when they do not have confidence or certainty that funding pots and streams will survive the economic storms.

This leads to a reluctance to invest in new approaches and longer-term initiatives - such as whole family hubs - without assurance that funding will follow.

Whilst I am clear that more money is not the answer to every problem, I am as clear that the promise will not be kept without substantial work that gives the 'system' sufficient resources to plan and to care, distributed in a way that enables a sustained focus on whole lives.

That requires more money earlier in the 'system' that can only be realised with a new approach to funding and measuring the impact of this money.

This can feel very far removed from the day-to-day lives of children and families who are living with the real-life consequences of a 'system' where fiscal challenges get in the way of services to support them. I believe a lack of alignment, cohesion, and longer-term funding certainty is at the heart of the problem, and focusing on this will support the 'system' to improve lives.

Many, including me, have said this before, but it is worth repeating. Prevention is not only morally the right thing to do, but it will drive efficiencies and save money over the longer term. The cost of failure to do this is often felt by those who live in and around the 'care system'.

How can Scotland continue to strive for wholesale change across a complex set of interwoven 'systems' when there continues to be a palpable failure to drive the structural

approaches required for the long term?

I've always thought it more effective to be part of the work for change than to critique from afar, but I will be candid: there have been times that belief has been sorely tested.

Observing some 'systems' revert to type, find comfort in their silos, and be unable or unwilling to unblock known barriers has been, and continues to be, exceptionally frustrating.

A bright spot on the horizon is [the Verity House Agreement](#), agreed in the summer, with a commitment to removing ring-fencing and consequent reporting requirements. The First Minister wearing a 'promise' badge whilst signing the agreement brought hope to many – and provided an opportunity to push harder for the change needed.

I am working with the Government in pursuit of new approaches, and whilst there are frustrations (on both sides), I do believe that there is appetite and desire to honestly grapple with what gets in the way of change, from the Cabinet and The Promise Sub-Committee, through to officials in the civil service.

What next

For the promise to be kept in full, across Scotland for all children and families, Plan 24-30 must build on progress and momentum so far, be more definitive about what change is needed where, and break down barriers.

Over the autumn and winter, I will continue the conversations on what is needed regarding content and structure for Plan 24-30. I will be listening and curating the range of actions required over the coming six years for the promise to be kept - making clear which organisations need to do what by when.

The sequencing of all this will be used to inform:

- an accountability framework that will track and monitor delivery;
- how impact will be measured through better use of data that reflects what matters most to children, families and care experienced adults;
- how investment must be made in what is needed; and
- a new approach to governance and scrutiny underpinned by fit-for-purpose legislation.

I asked for feedback in the summer because I want to make sure everyone has a chance to input to every stage of what comes next - starting with the way Plan 24-30 is devised. And am enormously grateful for all the responses. These have helped further cement what is already known about the gap between ingenuity and implementation, and the

challenges that have arisen or worsened since 2020.

It is clear the only way to do the work of devising Plan 24-30 is together.

I said I would publish a planning methodology in the autumn and I'm beginning this by publishing a timeline that makes it clear how we will get to publication of Plan 24-30 and the activities in each stage, including opportunities to be involved. This timeline will be published in November and will provide information of who is involved in this work and when.

Critically in all of this, the care community will continue to be central.

My intention is also to engage directly with the Cabinet Sub-Committee for the promise. Meanwhile, I will continue to push for progress, for system and structure change, and keep you updated.

With thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Duncan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fiona Duncan

Independent Strategic Advisor