

Scottish Parliament 'Keeping the Promise' debate: The Promise Scotland briefing

6th November 2024

[The Promise Scotland](#) exists to support Scotland as it works to keep the [promise](#) to Scotland's children, families and care experienced people following the conclusions of the [Independent Care Review](#). The Promise Scotland is the custodian of [Plan 24-30](#), which sets out a series of routemaps to keep Scotland on track to keep the promise by 2030.

Keeping the promise involves transforming the entirety of Scotland's 'care system', so that children, young people, families and care experienced adults are at its centre. The Promise Scotland directly supports the work of multiple organisations and agencies, across many sectors working to make that happen by 2030 at the very latest.

Key messages

Over the last 4½ years, substantial progress has been made **towards keeping the promise—and change has happened.** There is **a lot of fantastic work** happening all across the country, by dedicated and caring people. However, for Scotland to achieve its collective promise by 2030, **there needs to be a step change in the pace and scale of work. As the midway point to 2030 is approached,** much more must be done so that change is felt consistently in the lives of children, families and care experienced adults. This includes:

- **Listening to children, families and care experienced adults, placing them at the centre of decisions about their lives.** This includes **redesigning the Children's Hearings System.**
- **Transforming the way that children and families are supported** so that where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they stay. Progress is being made but there is still a lot to do—particularly to ensure Scotland is spending its money in the right place.
- **Focusing on relationships** so that when living with family is not possible, children stay with their brothers and sisters and belong to loving homes, staying there for as long as possible—and returning there if they need.
- **Properly supporting young people moving on from care** into adulthood, and supporting **care experienced adults.**
- Ensuring a laser sharp focus on effective implementation, resourcing, recruitment and retention of the workforce. This includes adequate and sustainable funding and support to develop lasting and loving relationships.

- Changing the way that data is collected and the way Scotland speaks about children, families and care experienced adults—the ‘language of care’.
- Addressing systemic barriers, in particular, the five major bridges and barriers that have been identified through [Plan 24-30](#): policy, money, data, risk and scrutiny. This must include removing profit from the ‘care system’.

Over the last four and a half years, substantial progress has been made towards keeping the promise in Scotland—and change has happened. On a national scale, this has included the passage of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, which ensured children are no longer placed in Young Offenders Institutions; commitment to the £500m Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and the care leaver payment; the incorporation of UNCRC into Scots law; and the new Scottish Recommended Allowance for foster and kinship carers and Care Experienced Students Bursary. More information is outlined in the [Scottish Government’s Keeping the Promise Implementation Plan Progress Update](#).

At local levels, a lot of great work is taking place because of hardworking and committed members of the workforce, particularly around keeping brothers and sisters together, the work of Virtual Headteachers, enabling important relationships, supporting young people moving on from care into adulthood and changing the culture and language. The Promise Scotland has shared some of these through the [‘Stories of Change’ project](#) and [COSLA has set out some examples in their recent report](#).

However, as Scotland approaches the midway point to 2030, much more must be done so that change can be felt more consistently in the lives of care experienced children, young people and families. The shifting economic context, the persistence of poverty and the experiences of children, young people, families and care experienced adults to date means that for Scotland to achieve its collective ambition, **there needs to be a step change in pace and in scale**.

It is crucial not to lose the overall vision for transformational change set out by the Independent Care Review—which outlines a smaller, more specialised ‘care system’. Specific attention must be paid to addressing the following areas and ensuring that the voices of the 5,500 children, young people, families, care experienced adults and members of the paid and unpaid workforce who shared their story with the Independent Care Review are not lost.

- 1. Children and families must be recognised as experts in their own lives and be involved and engaged in the important decisions that affect them.** The recommendations included in our [advocacy scoping report](#) and the recommendations set out in the Hearings System Working Group’s report, [Hearings for Children](#), must be implemented. This will result in a statutory right to advocacy for care experienced children, adults and families and a significantly smaller and more specialised Children’s Hearings System, which takes an inquisitorial, rights-based approach. Our [response](#) to the current Scottish Government’s consultation on Redesigning the Children’s Hearings System sets out our positioning in more detail. Crucially, the calls from children and young people for consistent decision-makers in the Children’s Hearings System must be realised.

2. **The ongoing work to embed early help and support for families must continue, including through the £500m Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.** There must be a renewed effort, building on the strong emphasis on whole family support in the recent Programme for Government, to ensure that all families are able to access emotional, practical and financial support to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so. More work is needed to address policy and funding siloes, reduce duplication and ensure longer-term funding is available. Legislative change must also be considered, including to secure a right to Family Group Decision Making in Scots law. Children and families must also be able to access more intensive support—at the moment this is not consistently available across Scotland.
3. **There must be a focus on relationships** so that when living with family is not possible children stay with their brothers and sisters and belong to loving homes, staying there for as long as possible—and returning there if they need. There are considerable challenges to implementing the existing legislation relating to brothers and sisters—not least in terms of housing—and these must be overcome.

The Scottish Government recently published [a consultation on the future of foster care](#) and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) recently [published its report on reimagining Secure Care](#). In order for these ambitious reforms to be realised, there must be a laser sharp focus on **effective implementation, resourcing, recruitment and retention of the workforce**. This includes adequate, sustainable funding and support to develop lasting and loving relationships and remove unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

4. **Young people moving on from care into adulthood must be properly supported.** We have set out more detail of what changes are required in our [response](#) to the Scottish Government's 'Moving On' consultation. In particular, the current disparity and inconsistency in implementing existing 'continuing care' and 'aftercare' duties must be addressed. There must be extensions to existing duties so that more young people, including children and young people on Kinship Care Orders and young people in further and higher education, can access more support. **Scotland must plan for more young people to 'stay put'** in their setting of care for as long as they need or want to and **a statutory 'right to return' to settings of care must be introduced** for young adults for whom Scotland has taken on parenting responsibility.
5. **Systemic barriers must be addressed, in particular, the five key issues that have been identified through Plan 24-30: policy, money, data, risk and scrutiny.** These are all issues that relate more broadly to the wider public sector reform agenda and have a significant impact on local delivery of work to keep the promise.

There is a clear need for **strategic leadership to sequence the many changes and proposals properly and coherently**. It is crucial for ensuring the workforce does not feel overwhelmed by the changes which are being considered in parallel to one another but are well resourced and the current recruitment and retention challenges are overcome. There must be an **overhaul of scrutiny** and the **way that data is collected** so that Scotland is able to understand better how it cares for its children and is better able to measure what

matters to children. Changes must be made to ensure **that profit is removed from Scotland's 'care system'**.

Not all changes require legislative change, but where it is required, legislation must not further complicate and clutter the existing landscape. The **upcoming Promise Bill must be broad enough in scope** to ensure that the required legislative changes are made for Scotland to keep the promise, everywhere, every day and to everyone.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with The Promise Scotland's Policy Officer, Emma Young, with any questions or comments about this briefing: emma@thepromise.scot