

Resetting public services: Governance and accountability to keep the promise

2024

Foreword

The way our public services are governed and held to account in Scotland needs to be different if Scotland is to #KeepThePromise. Given the current financial and societal context, this has never been more important. This paper is based on the experience of the Independent Care Review, the work of The Promise Scotland, and the many reports that have commented on governance and public service reform.

The Promise Scotland committed to working with the Scottish Government to explore how Scotland's systems of governance need to change to #KeepThePromise. This document sets out some fundamental issues which need to be addressed. While our focus remains resolutely on improving the lives of care experienced children, young people and their families, the messages here apply much more widely. This is about the reform of public services to #KeepThePromise.

A reformed approach to governance needs to achieve two things: first, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by the care system are at the very heart of decision making, rather than being just one of many factors that are taken into account; and in doing so, addressing the power imbalance that too often is experienced by children, young people, families and care experienced adults in and around the care system (not to mention other public services).

The changes set out here are also key to unlocking the power and potential of everyone working with children, young people, and their families in Scotland. The paper argues for a different approach to how decisions are made and how money is spent. The new approach must deliver changes in behaviours, new ways of leading, improved scrutiny and inspection and changed ways working. It is a natural, and necessary, evolution from our shared learning in Scotland about effective and collective responsibility for over a decade.

We look forward to working with partners to ensure that decisions are made, and money is spent, in the best interests of children, young people and families and that Scotland keeps its promise.

Fraser McKinlay, Chief Executive, The Promise Scotland.

Purpose of this paper

“Continuing as we are is not an option.”

There is much to celebrate about Scotland’s public services. Despite an extremely challenging environment, public servants across the country deliver outstanding work, day-in and day-out. And yet, despite this, we know that too often public services struggle to improve lives to the extent they should, especially for care experienced children, young people, and their families. The publication [of the education outcomes data for children with care experience](#) is a stark reminder that, across many measures, the gaps between care experienced young people and their non-care experienced peers is still too wide.

There is widespread acceptance that our public services are not currently set up to tackle the major difficulties facing people in communities across Scotland. The financial position is as challenging as anything Scotland has faced in the devolution era. There is an increasing acknowledgement that the current model of public service delivery in Scotland simply isn’t sustainable. As the Scottish Government stated in its [update to the Finance and Public Administration Committee in November 2023](#):

If public services are to remain sustainable, reform is both necessary and inevitable, as the 2022 Resource Spending Review (RSR) made clear. The Scottish Fiscal Commission have reinforced the long-term nature of the fiscal challenge. Continuing as we are is not an option.”

This report is designed to support an honest conversation about the limitations of our current governance systems and stimulate some serious engagement around what needs to change. This engagement needs to deliver real and lasting change. This, in turn, must be felt in the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families, delivering the improvement in their lives that the promise demands.

The work that flows from this paper must be solutions-focused, rather than a series of abstract conversations. Ultimately, the benefits that flow from the work around governance will be felt in the lives of children, young people, families and care experienced adults. In the first instance, however, this paper is written mainly for the Scottish Government, local authorities and the full range of public bodies who are committed to #KeepingThePromise. This is primarily where changes in governance are needed.

Where positive changes happen, and there are many, it is still too often despite, not because of, the way public services are governed and operate. This severely limits Scotland’s ability to #KeepThePromise. The Independent Care Review showed through [Kyle](#) and [Isla’s](#) stories the impact of current ways of working.

The Scottish Government’s [Keeping the Promise Implementation Plan](#) recognised the importance of governance to #KeepingThePromise, and this paper is The Promise Scotland’s contribution to the collaborative work that will be undertaken in 2024/25. This document is also a contribution to [Plan 24-30](#), Scotland’s plan to #KeepThePromise by 2030.

Why does governance matter?

“The landscape is messy and inconsistent - and it needs to change”. (Oversight Board Report ONE, May 2022)

Governance is about how decisions are made and how money is spent. When things go wrong (and this is true of all sectors, not just the public sector), governance is often to be found at the heart of the failure. Governance mechanisms are the foundation for how systems, and more importantly people, are held to account and how they are incentivised. And that means that ‘good governance’ can have a direct influence on how public services are experienced by citizens.

In the context of the care system, Independent Care review concluded:

Scotland must declutter the landscape of how it cares. Services and provision must be designed on the basis of need and with clear data, rather than on an acceptance of the how the system has always operated. (the promise p. 110)

The Oversight Board, in its first report published in May 2022, commented on the complex governance landscape and the myriad accountabilities across many organisations in the so called ‘care system’, concluding:

Accountability needs to focus away from the individual parts of the ‘system’ and towards a collective accountability framework focused on the needs of children, young people and their families.

It is clear then, that governance matters, including the role of independent scrutiny organisations. But governance is about much more than regulation and inspection. For the promise to be kept, every organisation that touches the lives of children, young people and families in Scotland must think deeply about how their systems of accountability and incentives are ensuring that their people are doing the right things, in the right way.

Scotland’s public services do not need another action plan or programme adding pressure to an already overloaded system. They need a different way of working. This paper sets out five principles that should be built into a reset of how Scotland’s public services are governed. These five principles map across to the ambitions set out by Scottish Government for public sector reform and should help to inform that ten-year programme. By putting these governance principles at the heart of public sector reform, Scotland can #KeepThePromise.

Wider context

This paper, and the work that will follow, comes at a time of unprecedented challenge and pressure across Scotland’s public services. To highlight just some of the context that is relevant to this discussion around governance:

- The financial position facing Scotland’s public services is perhaps as challenging as it has been in the post devolution era. This means that decisions around investment – and disinvestment – are more urgent and important than ever.
- An increasing number of people recognise the need for change and there is widespread acknowledgment that Scotland’s public services, as currently designed, are no longer

sustainable or doing enough to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. The overriding purpose of public servants is to improve lives, yet current ways of working make this difficult.

- The Scottish Government has set out key aims and principles for a ten-year programme of public service reform, and published its first [biannual public service reform progress report](#), in December 2023. The public service reform programme is designed to:
 - ensure public services remain fiscally sustainable, by reducing the costs and reducing long-term demand through investment in prevention
 - improve outcomes, which will improve lives and reduce demand
 - reduce inequalities of outcome among communities in Scotland, recognising the need not just for improved outcomes, but a focus in policy and delivery on those most disadvantaged.
- The [Verity House Agreement](#) continues to be an important backdrop to the relationship in Scotland between national and local government, bringing both challenges and opportunities.
- The continuing debates around the shape and scope of the **National Care Service** have shown that public services are fragmented, and that structural change alone will not improve outcomes.

The fundamental problem

The Independent Care Review demonstrated that current systems are bureaucratic, siloed, and too focused on the short term. They often get in the way of making improvements, despite everyone's best intentions. Scotland's systems of governance tend to prioritise a siloed approach to accountability, rather than a more collaborative approach.

The people working in Scotland's public services need to both deliver services now and look to the future, constantly making complex decisions about how best to use scarce resources. This is hard to balance and is at the heart of the problem.

The necessity of crisis intervention and day-to-day operation of services is too often the most urgent focus, rather than the needs, hopes and ambitions of care experienced people and their families. This way of working is poor for those who need support, and poor for people working in public services.

Reports on the need for public sector reform have highlighted the disconnect between policy ambition and delivery in Scotland, although their recommendations have not always been enacted. This includes The Christie Commission report, (2011), The Crerar Review (2007) and work by the Scottish Leaders Forum on [accountability and incentives](#). The problem is not so much 'what' we need to do, but an absence of consensus about 'how' to do it.

This paper also draws on practical work taking place in the UK on a Human Learning Systems approach and on sensemaking and complexity. We have learned from international thinking on new approaches to governance for our times. A selection of further reading is at Appendix 1.

Resetting public services to #KeepThePromise

There are five principles that need to be applied for this approach to work. Each of these applies across multiple levels – national, regional, local, and individual. They apply to all levels of government, scrutiny bodies, the NHS, police, social services, education and beyond.

Relationship focused public services				
1. Leadership A conscious commitment to improving care experienced people's lives	2. Bespoke Frontline services built around care experienced people	3. Accountability Sharper and more transparent accountability	4. Money Rebalancing investment towards prevention	5. Simplicity Streamlining, reducing clutter, duplication, and confusion
Connection to Scottish Government plan for Public Sector Reform				
Convening	Enabling	Enabling	Saving	Aligning

Relationship focused public services

Instilling a conscious commitment to improving outcomes and humanising public services

At the heart of this model is a high value on relationships, building a genuine system of care around care experienced children, young people, their families, and care experienced adults where their strengths and needs are central. It is about rebalancing power towards care experienced people.

When it comes to issues such as education, health and criminal justice, research and experience tell us that none of these things can be seen in isolation. They are not separate from people's lives or their experiences. A transactional approach to a single issue is unlikely to make the most difference. People do not live their lives in neat policy silos.

Public services taking a much more holistic approach to people's lives is what matters. This means it is not always possible to imagine exactly what the outcome might be. This is about a process of learning and understanding, working alongside families.

Done properly, this approach will bring significant changes in how public services are led; how front-line staff work; how money is used; and how governance, assurance, and accountability function. These are in our gift to change now. It also means that there needs to be a sweeping away of the clutter in our public services and a reduction in the confusion and waste this brings.

1. Leadership for improving lives

A conscious commitment to improving care experienced people's lives

Leaders have a vital role in shaping culture and ways of working. While legislation and rules have an important part to play in the day-to-day machinery of public services, the choices and attitudes of leaders significantly shape what is done and how it is done. It is possible, under current arrangements, to put a premium on outcomes and

improving lives. A wide range of [initiatives by Local Authorities and their partners](#) are underway to prioritise and embed a focus on #KeepingThePromise. From changing how language is used around care experience, prioritising people’s voices and refocusing how budgets are used to support care experienced children and their families.

The public still needs to know that organisations are well managed, and that public money is being looked after. But this is not enough. It is possible to have ‘well run’ organisations that fail care experienced people. There is a need for our systems of governance to reframe what success looks like in the delivery of public services.

What would help to make this work?

- | |
|---|
| <p>1. Leaders to state a conscious commitment to improve the lives of care experienced people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders need to make a strong, public, and conscious commitment to do all they can to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. • Improving the lives of care experienced people through partnership working should be one of the most important priorities for leaders. • Leaders of organisations which are corporate parents must be explicit in how they are fulfilling their corporate parenting responsibilities. |
| <p>2. Build into leaders’ objectives and ways of working how they will improve the lives of care experienced people and their families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders’ personal objectives should include a requirement to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families, and to demonstrate improvement in their outcomes. • Leaders need to have a strong focus on two very different perspectives in their work. Firstly, they must ensure that standards and rules are followed, that people are safe, and resources well spent. But it is just as important, and more likely to be neglected, that our leaders also prioritise relational ways of working, such as kindness, and consider issues such as belonging and compassion in their roles. • This should form part of leadership annual appraisal processes. |
| <p>3. Hold leaders to account for their part in partnership working and their contribution to care experienced people’s lives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, this should form part of leadership annual appraisal processes. • Leaders should be held to account for making a strong contribution as part of partnerships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For national leaders, scrutiny bodies and leaders in Scottish Government who play a part in, or have influence over, the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families, this means a tangible contribution to working across silos and giving priority to making a collective difference to people’s lives, as well as functional or organisational responsibilities. ○ For local leaders, this means their contribution specifically to the Community Planning Partnership and Children’s Strategic Planning Partnership. • It should be evident that partnership working translates into tangible differences in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How resources are used. ○ What work is done. ○ How it is done, in line with the approach set out in this paper. ○ What difference is made to people’s lives. |

4. Make clear in strategy how the lives and outcomes of care experienced people will be improved

- Leaders should put in place a strong strategic and longer-term link between the work of the organisation and improving the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. This should not only focus on the current year, but over the longer term.
- Organisations who have any role that affects the lives of care experienced children, young people or their families should be explicit about their contribution to Keeping the Promise and track their contribution, through data and stories.
- Corporate parenting strategies and plans must be fully integrated into the wider organisational and partnership strategies and plans – it is not a separate or stand alone activity.

5. Set out a better and more sustainable way of working to improve care experienced people's lives

- Leaders setting clear expectations, and acting as role models, for new ways of working that:
 - Listens to and understands the lives of care experienced people and their families and the difference that services are making, or not, and makes this visible across the organisation and partnerships.
 - Shifts money towards prevention of problems for care experienced people and their families.
 - Supports frontline relationships to flourish and empowers staff working with care experienced people and their families.
 - Holds everyone in the organisation to account for improving the lives of care experienced children, young people and their families.

2. Bespoke frontline services

Frontline services built around care experienced people and their families

There is a need to rebalance power towards care experienced people and families. There is a need to put relationships back at the heart of public service, rather than the bureaucracy of our organisations being the driving force. This needs to shift by prioritising the relationship between the care experienced child, young person, and their family with services. By recognising the centrality of this relationship, investing in it, and supporting it, a different way of working is possible. Deeply understanding *'what matters to you'* will almost always result in a better outcome.

Scotland has experience of more tailored ways of working, through schemes like [Self-Directed Support](#) and the [Independent Living Fund](#), and examples such as the work by [The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration: Giving Children a Voice in Scheduling](#). There needs to be a larger scale commitment to this more bespoke way of working.

The case has been made for locally focused bespoke approaches, collaborating with people so they can make the decisions about what most improves their lives. This brings more than just a service provided, it brings a rebalancing of power. A sense of choice, control, agency over your own life and sustained relationships. This brings a positive effect for the people working in the system too.

Critical to the success of this approach is well trained and supported staff, who are able

to build relationships over time and have the freedom to operate, to realise this power shift. It can work, for example in Fife and in North Lanarkshire, where social work teams worked with families most at need to get them help with whatever they needed, shifting resources around to be more flexible.

The Scottish Government and COSLA recognise the importance of localised, place based approaches in achieving improvements when dealing with complexity, for example in the Verity House agreement and in [The Place Principle](#). However, a new model cannot simply be bolted on to existing arrangements. It needs a fundamental shift in culture. It also needs investment – more time invested in meaningful relationships requires investment to make that work and to give practitioners the time, space and support they need.

What would help to make this work?

1. Give space to properly understand context

- People who work most closely with care experienced children, young people and their families need to have time to understand their unique lives, strengths, and challenges.
- Workers do not apply checklists or carry out ‘assessments’. They ‘meet people where they are at’. This is a richer way of helping and working with people and will deliver better outcomes.
- There is a need to critically review the administrative burdens on front line staff, with a view to removing, reducing and streamlining those wherever possible.
- This will involve taking a more holistic view of risk, ensuring that staff are empowered, their professional experience is respected and that their organisations have their backs.

2. Protect longer-term relationships

- Prioritise longer-term, enduring relationships.
- There is no pre-set limit to the number of ‘sessions’.
- Relationships need time to develop and there needs to be consistency in who children, young people and families work with.
- Care experienced children, young people and their families must never have to keep retelling their story because of staff changes or handovers. This is retraumatising.

3. Empower staff to do what will improve lives

- Staff are empowered and have the flexibility to use resources to get the help that care experienced people and their families need.
- The relationship they build is about finding innovative solutions to improve the lives of care experienced people and their families.

4. Focus services around the relationship and the person

- The people who know the family best must have the power to make service boundaries invisible to the care experienced person / family they are working with.
- They need to be able to work with people until they have the support they need, not hand off care experienced children, young people, or their families to others.
- Specialists come to the care experienced person or their family, rather than having to navigate a highly complex network of people and organisations.

3. Sharpen accountability for outcomes

Sharper and more transparent accountability for outcomes

Accountability is a powerful tool and needs to be applied with more precision to the things that matter most to people's lives if Scotland is to #KeepThePromise. While individual professionals, services, and organisations are held to account, there is less focus on holding people and organisations to account for how they work together to deploy their considerable resources collectively to better effect. Too often, our systems of governance and accountability focus on what's important to systems and institutions, rather than what matters to families and communities. It is easier to hold people to account for building a new school or hospital, or for hitting a performance target, than it is to hold to account for delivering outcomes and improving lives. Safeguards are also important. For that there are standards, regulations, and inspections. These need to be streamlined and pull in the same direction – to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. This includes audit and inspection regimes across local authorities, Scottish Government, care services, education, justice, and health.

The accountability system needs to be rebuilt, in terms of how it relates to the promise (and outcomes in general). What is needed is a system that has boundaries and assurance mechanisms, but that values and prioritises a wider distribution of power, relationships, and voice. It needs to be more critical about how well resources are really being used to improve lives.

In the current context, public services too often focus on and manage short-term risks, rather than bigger, longer-term and more complex risks. It is easier to focus on operational risks than the bigger risks of unsustainable demand or not shifting to a preventative approach. While public services 'address' the short-term risks, the most important factors are ignored. In this case, the longer-term impact on children and families is not seen as a risk. Public services need to broaden the understanding of risk. As the Independent Care Review noted:

"This is not about tolerating more risk or becoming more risk enabling. It means ensuring Scotland has a more holistic understanding of risk that includes the risk to the child of removing them from the family. There must be a shift in focus from the risk of possible harm to the risk of not having stable, long term loving relationships."

As things stand, the reality is that it is still possible to meet all the requirements of the 'assurance system' but still fail care experienced people and families. We know that because most services and organisations do not receive negative review findings, they are technically "well run", yet our public services can do much more to improve the lives of care experienced children and their families.

There are numerous partnership arrangements in Scotland. These are the foundation of helping the complex system to do the right thing. Yet there is limited measurement of the success of these partnerships and leaders are not always held to account for their contribution to them. It seems easier to stick with old models of accountability, despite these being less relevant to the problems we are trying to address today.

There are three main problems with this approach:

- It leads to a lack of clarity around who is accountable for the delivery of improved outcomes. This is one of the reasons there is a recurring gap between policy intent and delivery. It can also lead to an erosion of trust in public services and those that lead them. The voices of those with lived experience are too often absent in decision making processes.
- This bleeds into the second problem, whereby scrutiny and inspection bodies then find it hard to hold people to account for delivering outcomes. and their focus is too heavily weighted towards compliance and risk management. This in turn is a major driver of the behaviours and priorities of those working in public service.
- Just as there are silos in our public services which lead to problems, our scrutiny bodies are siloed too. A lot can be achieved within the constraints of the current operating model. But in principle five, we argue that this might not go far enough to make the step change that we want to see.

The accountability focus that is taken (or not taken), has an effect right across public services. What gets measured gets done. Whether that is accountability to Scottish Government, an oversight board, a scrutiny or inspection body or from an internal or external review, it profoundly shapes our culture and ways of working.

There are examples of how to do this well. The Care Inspectorate is placing a much greater focus on outcomes and what difference public services are really making to people's lives through their work, including [Embedding Voice in Practice](#). [Scottish Borders Council](#) has identified The Promise as its 'umbrella policy driver' for all its work with children, young people, and families. This commitment is reflected through the structure of its new strategic Children and Young People's Planning Partnership and in the council's Children's Services Plan priorities.

But this is not enough. Joint working has happened among scrutiny bodies, but this has tended to be on single issues or projects and not embedded as a way of working. Scrutiny partners are now working together on what a new model of scrutiny might look like.

The Scottish Leaders Forum (SLF) recognised the challenge of building accountability frameworks around outcomes and collective responsibility some time ago, publishing its report on [accountability and incentives in 2021](#). It is now time to revisit this important work and to agree how to embed the approaches into public services.

What would help to make this work?

1. Building on the principles contained in this report and the SLF report from 2021:

- Scottish Government and CoSLA to agree a framework of accountability for #KeepingThePromise at the national level, initially built around the promise story of [progress monitoring framework](#).
- Scottish Ministers to report regularly to the Scottish Parliament on progress with #KeepingThePromise on a national basis.
- Elected members in each of Scotland's 32 local Authorities to agree clear accountability frameworks for reporting to local communities on how the promise is being kept in their local areas.
- Scottish Government, through existing sponsorship arrangements, to agree clear accountability mechanisms with public bodies for their contributions to #KeepingThePromise.
- Each of Scotland's 32 Community Planning Partnerships should establish a clear line of sight with their Children's Services Planning Partnership, to ensure clear accountability and monitoring for #KeepingThePromise.

2. Data focused on outcomes

- Data needs to serve the revised purpose of accountability - to create a healthy system around each care experienced child, young person, and their families.
- Organisations should know what data they need to govern the system of care around each young person.
Scrutiny bodies need to make smarter use of data to focus their work and inform their joint work. For example, are there particular geographical areas or age groups where there are signs of potential problems? Are they seeing patterns that suggest a concern? There is real benefit in their reach across the public sector landscape
- which is not being fully realised.

3. Minimise the reporting burden on public bodies

- Scottish Government, local authorities, inspectors and regulators need to review reporting requirements to help reduce bureaucracy for those working directly with care experienced children, young people, and their families. Various reporting lines and requirements are placing a heavy burden on front line services. This is also part of driving a risk averse and punitive approach.

4. Hold public bodies and partnerships to account for their contribution

- The Scottish Government and scrutiny bodies need to do more to hold partnerships to account, rather than mainly focusing on the accountabilities of individual organisations. It is possible to shift the balance towards more [collaborative governance](#), bringing more collective accountability, specifically taking account of outcomes and place-based approaches.

5. Scrutiny bodies to prioritise what matters to children, young people and families

- Scottish Government and scrutiny bodies need to ensure all scrutiny activity is proportionate and focused on what matters to children, young people and families, rather than the system.
- Scottish Government needs to set out a clear and consistent purpose and focus for scrutiny bodies who have an impact on the lives of care experienced people and their families. This should include reference to the National Performance Framework and prioritise a human rights and outcomes-based approach.
- Scrutiny bodies need to develop approaches for working together around outcomes, in this instance for care experienced people.
- If scrutiny and assurance bodies' directions or governance needs to change to allow a greater focus on outcomes, they need to work with government and others to set out how this can happen.
- Scrutiny bodies need to consider whether their programmes are leading to improvement, having a positive impact, or driving unhelpful behaviours.

6. Take a more strategic approach to risk management.

- This means ensuring that the basics regarding keeping children and young people safe remain central, but that public services also look seriously at the wider impact of their ways of working on people's lives.
- In particular, the longer-term risks of removing children and young people from their families need to be more prominent in the consideration of risk and, in turn, approaches to inspection and regulation
- Taking this approach has more chance of supporting positive and ambitious change, and potentially revealing some opportunities which have hitherto been less visible.

4. Focus money on prevention and link it to outcomes

Rebalancing investment towards prevention

Public services are not currently making maximum use of the resources available to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. The current approach presents several fundamental issues:

- A focus on **improving efficiencies and standardisation** is not helping to improve people's lives. The pressure to work this way has increased over time because of scarcity of resources and governance mechanisms driving this way of working. It is another example of not prioritising relationships or understanding complexity.
- There are a plethora of relatively small and specific initiatives or projects, each with different reporting and finance arrangements, all layered on top of each other. What would be better is a core commitment to different ways of working, supported by more flexible funding.
- Short-term funding, often controlled and directed centrally, has resulted in a myriad of reporting requirements and increased siloed working. It makes the job of staff working in the system harder as they try and juggle various pots of money to get the job done. It also reduces their freedom to operate and gets in the way of building strong, sustainable relationships. There are many reports that give evidence that this approach is problematic:

“Strained, insecure and short-term funding models minimise equitable service access and timely relational support for children and families. They also delay timely access to services” ([North Strathclyde Bairns Hoose Evaluation Phase One Report, March 2023 \(ed.ac.uk\)](#))

- Scotland already invests significant amounts of public money, around £1 billion, on the ‘care system’, but not always on the right things. The Independent Care Review’s report, [Follow the Money](#), sets out the human and economic cost of a system that too often doesn’t provide children, young people and families with the support they need and deserve.
- Care experienced children, young people and their families – and Scotland - should be seeing better outcomes from this level of spend. The current system does not represent value for money. There are several reasons for this:
 - Money is not spent on those things that help to prevent harm and improve lives, with too much spent on acute and crisis services.
 - [The Independent Care Review](#) was clear that Scotland must avoid the monetisation and marketisation of the care of children. This means, as things improve, the services delivered and how resources are used will be different than they are now. Some organisations and services will need to change dramatically and perhaps cease to exist, as new arrangements emerge that make for better lives, take their place. This change will be difficult.
 - Scotland has not yet managed to tackle the pervasive effects of poverty. It is well established that one of the most effective (and efficient) ways of tackling poverty is to increase the amount of money in people’s pockets. But too often our systems of governance and accountability are reluctant to promote ‘cash first’ approaches, with the prevailing culture of ‘the system knows best’ still dominant.
- Because of the way public services are organised, it is not possible to see how much is being spent on improving the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families.

All of this means even more time and money is being spent on trying to disentangle or work out how much money is spent and on what. The complicated approach to funding in silos is stifling. Partnerships are not held to account for how they collectively use resources to achieve better outcomes for care experienced children, young people, and their families.

What would help to make this work?

1. Stop short-term funding and ring-fenced initiatives

- The increasing prevalence of short-term and siloed funding is getting in the way of workers' ability to put relationships and need at the heart of working with care experienced children, young people, and their families.
- Control and direction over how resources are used needs to be as close to the person as possible.

2. Shift funding to spend it on those things that prevent crisis and make lives better

- Those things should arise from the close relationship built up with care experienced children, young people, and their families.
- By better understanding what people need, and matching resources to meet those needs earlier, public services can help shift towards preventative spend.

3. Hold partnerships to account for how effectively they spend their collective resources to improve lives.

- As with accountability, public services focus too much on how individual organisations use their resources, and less on how partnerships work together to maximise the impact from their collective resources.
- More work is needed to give a clearer demonstration of the value of the partnerships, how they apply their collective resources and how they are using this information to effect real demonstrable improvement and make decisions.
- Children's Services Planning Partnerships should be required to set out a clear and transparent account of their collective resource allocation at the start of each year and account for spend at the end of the year.

5. Simplifying public services

Streamlining, reducing clutter, avoiding duplication, challenging complexity

Finally, much more can be done to reform how public services work to have better outcomes for care experienced people and their families. Putting public services on a more sustainable footing is one of the Scottish Government's core priorities, supported by a ten-year public service reform programme. Given the financial context and outlook, it seems clear that this reform programme must, in part, be about designing a model of public services that can be delivered at significantly reduced cost. Scotland simply cannot afford the status quo.

It can also be argued that public services have become more distant from people's lives, and public servants are too often held back from doing the things they know are right because of systems, bureaucracy, and a culture of risk aversion. Public service reform therefore has to also address deeper issues of leadership, culture and rebalancing power.

Structural change is often complex and time consuming and is not, on its own, the answer to achieving better outcomes. That said, the proliferation of organisations, partnerships and requirements in Scotland is unhelpful and gets in the way of improving the lives of care experienced children, young people, and their families. Since the creation of the Scottish Parliament 25 years ago, there has been a tendency for successive governments to layer new legislation, organisations and partnerships on top of existing arrangements without removing or rationalising underlying structures.

What would help to make this work?

1. Review the current landscape and simplify

- As part of its public services reform programme, Scottish Government needs to urgently identify ways in which the complex landscape of organisations, partnerships, legislation and policy can be simplified, to reduce the burden on the system and focus on how to make the most positive difference to people's lives.
- This will help to:
 - Clarify accountabilities for #KeepingthePromise.
 - Reduce tensions and complexities for care experienced people and for people who work with them.
 - Ensure public services are more agile and responsive to needs and less rigid and fixed in the 'services' offered.
 - Make it easier to secure the number of high-quality leaders needed to run organisations, partnerships and systems.
 - Make working in public services more attractive as people spend more time building relationships with care experienced children, young people and their families and less time on bureaucracy.

Streamlining scrutiny and inspection

In relation to scrutiny bodies, many of the key messages in [The Crerar Review](#) still stand. Specifically, the report highlighted that "There is no consistent approach to setting up scrutiny bodies and it is not clear why organisations undertaking similar roles have been given different governance arrangements." The report noted the subsequent problems this causes. This needs to be addressed now in the context of the outcomes approach.

Difficult though structural reform is, Scottish Government needs to address this if the ambition of an outcomes focused way of working is to be realised. Scottish Government has committed to 'work with audit and scrutiny bodies to establish models for scrutiny and accountability that drive co-ordination of joint outcomes.' [The Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation in social care](#) sets out a series of recommendations which should ensure a more streamlined and proportionate scrutiny landscape.

The [Oversight Board Report ONE](#) set out the cluttered care landscape, including a section on scrutiny and inspection. To illustrate the practical impact of this cluttered governance landscape, Exhibit 1 shows the current scrutiny landscape as it relates to [Isla's](#) story, and then sets out what a revised approach to scrutiny could look like from Isla's perspective.

Exhibit 1 -Isla’s story and how inspection and scrutiny bodies currently relate to her life

Isla’s story	How scrutiny and inspection bodies currently may help Isla and her family
<p>Isla is ten. She moved in with a new family when she was four. She moved back in with her parents not long after, and things were much better when she went home.</p>	<p>While there is no specific work to look at housing for care experienced children, young people, or their families, if Isla and her family live in socially rented housing, they can look at the Scottish Housing Regulator’s website to see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of houses the landlord has, average weekly rents, how this compares to Scottish averages and how rent has changed • How satisfied tenants are • How long it takes for repairs to be done • Resolution of anti-social behaviour cases • How much rent is collected and how many empty homes. • Standards and quality of housing and safety <p>Isla and her family can also find out from the website how to complain if they have any concerns about their landlord.</p>
<p>Then her parents separated when she was six. Her mum was unwell and struggled.</p>	<p>While there is no specific work to look at health and care services for care experienced children, young people, or their families, Isla or her family can look at information online relating to these services.</p> <p>Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Mental Welfare Commission may have assessed the quality of the services her mum used. If the Mental Welfare Commission visited services, Isla’s mum may have been asked about the services she received.</p>
<p>Isla went to live with another new family. Isla liked it there, but she couldn’t stay. She’s since lived with another four new families.</p>	<p>Isla will have had contact with social care services. The Care Inspectorate will have inspected the care services that Isla and her family receive.</p>

<p>She thinks the hardest bit is having to change schools. She's left a lot of friends behind, and no one seems to remember to keep in touch. Her favourite time of day is lunchtime— the dinner ladies always seem really nice.</p> <p>Isla finds it really difficult to make friends and trust people. Her current classmates know she is in care, and she wishes they didn't. Isla's social worker visits every so often. Isla really likes her: she is fun and kind. Isla wishes she could see her more.</p>	<p>Isla's school will have been inspected by Education Scotland. The framework used will have considered : "Tracking and monitoring are well-understood and used effectively to secure improved outcomes for all learners, including the most deprived children and young people and those who are looked after."</p>
--	---

How could a better system of inspection and scrutiny help to make Isla and her family's lives better?

Isla's story	How might scrutiny and inspection help Isla and her family?
<p>When Isla was four, she moved in with a new family nearby, who she really liked. Her parents got lots of support, so when Isla went back to them things were much better.</p> <p>She started school and made lots of friends.</p> <p>When Isla was six, her parents separated. Her mum was unwell and needed help, so Isla went to stay with the same family. They were so happy to see her. Isla was sad, but knew that her mum was being looked after.</p> <p>Her social worker told Isla she's going home in two weeks. The family she's staying with are helping her get ready to leave. Isla can't wait to go home, but she's glad she got time to say goodbye. They had a tea party and told her they'd always be there for Isla and her mum.</p> <p>Isla's home now, and her mum is much better. There are people who visit who really help. Isla really likes that her social worker still comes to visit. Isla feels safe and happy and knows there are always people she can rely on if things get hard again.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny and inspection bodies worked together to consider all the support that care experienced children, young people and their families need, including Isla's family. • This includes looking at the responsiveness, quality and impact on Isla and her families lives, relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ their home ○ any healthcare they needed ○ the social care services that they needed ○ how the school helped to support Isla ○ how resources, including money, were used to help support Isla and her family • As part of one joined up approach, specialist experts in each area helped to make sure that the support Isla and her family received was as good as possible. • They placed a premium on the areas set out in this report and in the Independent Care Review, including feedback on whether relationships were prioritised and whether Isla felt safe, supported, and listened to. • Jointly they formed judgements on whether this support was well coordinated and joined up, and most importantly, what difference this was making to Isla. • Where improvements were needed, they collectively made recommendations to the local Children's Services Planning Partnership, and to individual organisations involved. • They followed up on whether these recommendations were acted on and what changed for Isla and for other care experienced children, young people, and their families. • They prioritised two aspects – safety but equally what positive impact was being made to Isla's life. They also considered the extent to which Isla was being listened to and whether what mattered to her was considered.

Appendix 1 - Further information and references

This document is based on the work of the Care Review and The Promise Scotland. You can find more details on all this work here [Home - The Promise](#)

In producing this, The Promise Scotland drew on the work of the following organisations for evidence about how to change complex systems:

- [Home - The Cynefin Co](#)
- [It's time to reimagine government | Centre For Public Impact \(CPI\)](#)
- [About Human Learning Systems | Human Learning Systems](#)

This work is clearly aligned to the work of Scottish Government on the reform of public services. The latest update is [here](#).

We have taken account of the findings from the [Social care - Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation: recommendation report from September 2023](#).

We learned from the work of Carnegie UK on [Leading with Kindness](#) which addresses related themes.

Local models helped inform our thinking. Most notably:

- The [Bairns Hoose model](#) has started to introduce a different and better way of working, prioritising the child not the service providers.
- [Home • Changing Futures Northumbria](#)

We drew on the following OECD evidence about global governance trends [Global Trends in Government Innovation 2023 | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

We took account of this report to understand the impact on services for children - [Blueprint- for-childrens-social-care.pdf \(centreforpublicimpact.org\)](#)

We learned about the approach to such wide-ranging change from [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation: Skills Delivery Landscape Review – Final Report \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

We looked at this academic work on collaborative approaches to governance [Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance | Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](#)

We learned from earlier initiatives around redistributing power and local schemes based around needs:

- [Self-directed support \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)
- <https://ilf.scot/>

We drew on evidence regarding reducing poverty from the [Poverty and Inequality Commission](#) and [Public Health Scotland](#).

And we referred to this practical guide to adopting a human learning systems approach.

[hls- practical-guide.pdf \(centreforpublicimpact.org\)](#)

The important work by Carnegie helped inform our advice in this paper - [Kindness, emotions and human relationships: The blind spot in public policy - Carnegie UK Trust?](#)