



Appendix A: Strategic alignment of Scotland's strategic frameworks: the National Performance Framework, Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24–30

Purpose

This appendix demonstrates that Scotland already has a coherent strategic framework for reform. It compares the National Performance Framework (NPF), Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24-30 to show that they are complementary rather than competing and identifies opportunities to strengthen alignment rather than create new frameworks.

1. Introduction

In terms of keeping the promise Scotland has three significant national frameworks that collectively describe its long-term ambitions for improving outcomes:

- ♥ the NPF, setting the national outcomes Scotland seeks to achieve;
- ♥ Delivering for Scotland, setting out the government's vision for Public Service Reform; and
- ♥ Plan 24–30, providing the practical delivery framework for keeping the promise.

Considered together, these frameworks reveal a high degree of strategic alignment. They describe the same direction of travel from different perspectives: outcomes, reform and delivery.

2. Strategic alignment

Making those connections explicit in government would strengthen coherence, reduce duplication and provide a clearer line of sight from national ambition to implementation.

Public Service Reform Pillar	NPF contribution	Plan 24-30 contribution	Opportunity
Prevention	National Outcomes on Children and Young People, Poverty, Health & Wellbeing, Communities and Housing establish the ambition to reduce inequality, strengthen families and improve wellbeing through earlier support.	Provides a practical delivery framework centred on whole-family support, reducing crisis intervention, strengthening communities and shifting investment towards prevention.	Use Plan 24–30 to operationalise the Public Service Reform Strategy's prevention ambition through coordinated action, sequencing and measurable outcomes.
Joined up services	Outcomes promote integrated support, participation, human rights and services organised around people's lives rather than institutions.	Route maps connect the responsibilities of more than 100 organisations around shared outcomes, identifying dependencies and collective action required across sectors.	Position Plan 24–30 as a practical demonstration of how joined-up, cross-sector delivery can operate at national scale.

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Efficient services	The NPF provides a long-term national outcomes framework which Scotland can use to measure success, but provides limited guidance on how investment, resource allocation and reform should be aligned for delivery.	Identifies where funding, workforce and service redesign must shift towards prevention while maintaining high-quality support where needed. The Promise Story of Progress combines national indicators, organisational evidence and lived experience, while route maps provide clear responsibilities, milestones and delivery expectations.	Create stronger alignment between spending decisions, prevention investment and shared outcomes, reducing duplication and enabling planned long-term reform. Strengthen accountability by aligning national outcomes, delivery responsibilities and measures of progress, giving equal weight to experiential, organisational and national evidence.
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Overall, this alignment would make explicit that the Public Service Reform Strategy defines the direction of reform, while Plan 24–30 provides the delivery architecture for implementing structural change and the NPF provides the whole population outcomes Scotland aims to achieve. Aligning the three frameworks would strengthen coherence across government, reduce duplication and create a clearer line of sight from national outcomes to implementation.

3. Outcome mapping

The high-level alignment summarised above is reflected across the individual outcomes within the NPF and the delivery priorities in Plan 24–30. The following mapping illustrates this in more detail:

a) Children, Care & Relationships

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
- Children and Young People outcome - New “care” outcome - Health & Wellbeing outcome	- Children grow up loved, safe, respected - Stable, nurturing relationships - Care experience improves fundamentally	Strong alignment The addition of a specific care outcome in the draft NPF is a major improvement directly reflecting promise priorities

b) Family support and prevention

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
- Poverty outcome - Health & Wellbeing - Communities - Housing (new/strengthened)	- Families get help early - Reduced need for crisis/state intervention - Whole-family, relational support	Good conceptual alignment NPF spread across multiple outcomes = risk of fragmentation.

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- Plan 24–30 is more integrated and delivery-focused

c) Voice, rights and participation

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
• Human Rights & Equality outcome • Communities (empowerment)	• Children, families and care experienced people influence decisions • Rights (including UNCRC) embedded in practice	Strong values alignment • NPF is aspirational • Plan 24–30 is operational (who, what, by when)

d) Poverty, inequality and life chances

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
• Reduce Poverty outcome • Fair Work & Economy • Education	• Reduce poverty among families and care experienced people • Improve long-term outcomes (education, employment, health)	Very strong alignment • Shared recognition that inequality is systemic • Plan 24–30 is understandably sharper on distinct inequality of care experience

e) Workforce, leadership and culture

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
• Fair Work • (Indirectly) Communities / Wellbeing	• Workforce is supported, trusted, relational • Leadership enables system change • Culture shifts away from risk aversion	Partial alignment • NPF underplays system leadership, culture change in public services and relational practice. All of which are notable gaps

f) Systems (money, data, governance, accountability)

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
• Fair Work • (Indirectly) Communities / Wellbeing	• Funding shifts to prevention • Data is shared meaningfully • Accountability focuses on outcomes, not process • Policy and legislation align	Dissonance / weak / indirect alignment • NPF describes what success looks like but does not specify systems change • 24–30 is advanced on what changes must be made to which systems by who and when

g) Communities, place and belonging

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
• Communities • Housing	• Children and families supported in their communities	Good alignment • With NPF at outcome-level



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced disruption, better local support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With Plan 24–30 at delivery + system change |
|--|---|

h) Cross-cutting wellbeing and long-term outcomes

Draft NPF	Plan 24–30	Assessment
Whole population wellbeing framework	Focused on lifelong outcomes for a specific population (care experienced)	Complementary, not conflicting Plan 24–30 should act as a deep dive within the NPF

In summary:

strong alignment	partial alignment	dissonance
- Children's wellbeing and care experience - Poverty and inequality - Prevention and early support - Rights and participation - Joined-up services (in principle)	- Workforce and leadership - Communities and place - Family support (spread across NPF outcomes)	- System change (money, data, governance) - Delivery specificity and accountability - Relational practice vs system efficiency framing

4. The structural opportunities

The analysis suggests that Scotland does not require additional strategic frameworks to support reform. Rather, there is an opportunity to strengthen the relationships between existing frameworks so that they operate as a coherent whole.

💡 Use Plan 24–30 as a test case for the NPF

The sustained determination to keep the promise across systems and sectors could be used as an opportunity to enable demonstrations of how the National Outcomes could actually be delivered especially across care, poverty, communities and rights.

💡 Strengthen the NPF's "delivery spine"

The collaborative development of Plan 24–30 could be used to inform:

- Budgets – and how outcomes can be linked (see Cabinet Sub Committee Paper DATE)
- Accountability – and how outcomes can be linked (see Governance paper)
- Inspection/scrutiny – and how outcomes can be linked (note on AG meetings) – this is a gaps in the NPF.

💡 Create explicit mapping in government

There are opportunities to carry out more detailed, explicit mapping, to shore up the dissonance, strengthen coherence, improve accountability and reduce duplication, for example:

- Map each of the Plan 24–30's 25 route maps 30 to the NPF
- Map each of the NPF's outcome to show their contribution to keeping the promise

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Use the “care” outcome in the NPF as a system anchor

The new NPF ‘care’ outcome is a major opportunity to bridge the gap between the aspiration to reform and delivery of the promise, but only if it is more clearly tied to Plan 24–30 delivery and not treated as a standalone outcome.

Reframe success measures

There is an opportunity to make a shift from service efficiency / outputs towards human measures gleaned from lived experience including the stability of relationships and reduced interventions (Plan 24–30 already does this). Making these relationships explicit would:

- create a clearer line of sight between Scotland's long-term outcomes, reform priorities and delivery activity;
- strengthen cross-portfolio working by organising activity around shared outcomes rather than organisational boundaries;
- improve the alignment of investment, policy development and legislative reform with prevention;
- support a more coherent approach to accountability, scrutiny and performance measurement;
- enable the NPF, Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24–30 to reinforce rather than duplicate one another.

5. Conclusion

Taken together:

-  the NPF defines what Scotland wants to achieve;
-  the Public Service Reform Strategy describes how government intends to reform public services;
-  Plan 24–30 provides the practical delivery architecture for one of Scotland's most significant cross-government reform programmes.

Rather than representing parallel initiatives, the three frameworks can be understood as complementary layers of Scotland's reform architecture. Making these relationships explicit would strengthen coherence across government and provide a stronger foundation for delivering both Public Service Reform and Scotland's commitment to keep the promise by 2030.

The opportunities created by this alignment are explored in Appendix B.



Appendix B: From structural alignment to integrated delivery: opportunities for Public Service Reform and keeping the promise

Purpose

This appendix considers how strategic alignment could be translated into practical delivery. It identifies opportunities to use Plan 24-30 as the principal demonstration of Public Service Reform in practice.

1. Introduction

Appendix A demonstrates that the NPF, Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24-30 are strongly aligned in their strategic ambitions. Alignment alone, however, is insufficient to deliver reform and there are a number of structural opportunities that remain if Scotland is to translate that shared ambition into integrated delivery.

These opportunities do not represent disagreements between the frameworks. Rather, they identify where government systems, processes and accountability arrangements have yet to fully reflect their common direction of travel.

2. Areas of continued alignment

The Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24-30 are strongly aligned in their overall direction of travel. Both recognise that lasting improvement requires reform rather than incremental service improvement alone.

Prevention is the organising principle

Prevention sits at the heart of both frameworks. The Public Service Reform Strategy defines prevention as intervening early to stop problems arising or escalating, recognising that this delivers better outcomes for people while improving the long-term sustainability of public services. It identifies early years, family support and tackling child poverty as central priorities. Plan 24-30 reinforces this ambition, identifying the continued concentration of resources in responding to crisis and failure demand as a major barrier to keeping the promise. It provides a practical framework for shifting investment, capacity and policy towards earlier intervention while maintaining high-quality support where children, families and care experienced adults require it.

Public services need to be organised around people

Both frameworks recognise that people should experience public services as coherent, joined-up systems rather than fragmented organisations. The Public Service Reform Strategy emphasises collaboration across organisational boundaries so that people experiencing disadvantage do not have to navigate complex systems.

Plan 24-30 reaches the same conclusion through a different route. It recognises that the promise cannot be kept by the "care system" alone, but requires coordinated action across government, local government, public bodies and the third sector. It also makes explicit that improvements in practice depend upon structural change to policy, funding, governance, legislation, data and accountability.

The reform frameworks are complementary

The foundations of the Public Service Reform Strategy closely complement the systemic barriers and bridges identified through the work to develop Plan 24-30, outlined in [Reflect, Refocus, Reset](#).

Appendices: ‘Keeping the Promise: a Structural Framework for Lasting Public Service Reform’.



The Public Service Reform Strategy focuses on leadership and culture, accountability and incentives, empowerment, and the delivery landscape. Plan 24–30 identifies the structural conditions that enable these ambitions to be realised in practice, focusing on policy, funding, data, governance, risk and scrutiny. Together they describe complementary components of the same reform architecture.

3. Implementation challenges

The frameworks are closely aligned strategically, but implementation raises several challenges that require deliberate attention.

Maintaining outcomes as the primary driver

The Public Service Reform Strategy appropriately places considerable emphasis on fiscal sustainability, efficiency and reducing avoidable demand. These objectives are entirely consistent with prevention but risk becoming ends in themselves if not continually anchored in improvements to people's lives.

Plan 24–30 provides an important counterbalance by defining success in terms of lifelong outcomes for children, families and care experienced adults, recognising that financial sustainability should be achieved through better outcomes rather than becoming the primary objective of reform.

Measuring what matters

The Public Service Reform Strategy includes significant programmes relating to digital transformation, shared services, procurement and the public estate. These reforms have the potential to support more effective public services, but Plan 24–30 highlights the importance of ensuring that improvements in organisational efficiency translate into better experiences and outcomes for people.

This reinforces the need for performance frameworks that give equal weight to lived experience, relationships and long-term outcomes alongside organisational performance and efficiency.

Accountability that enables reform

Both frameworks recognise that existing accountability arrangements can inhibit innovation and collaboration. The Public Service Reform Strategy emphasises accountability arrangements that encourage learning, improvement and responsible risk-taking. Plan 24–30 develops this further by identifying the need for clearer accountability for shared, long-term outcomes across organisational boundaries.

Taken together, they point towards accountability systems that both support innovation and maintain clear responsibility for delivery.

Moving from alignment to integration

The Public Service Reform Strategy necessarily spans the breadth of government activity and references a range of major reform programmes, including keeping the promise. Plan 24–30, by contrast, provides detailed route maps, sequencing, responsibilities and milestones specifically designed to deliver the conclusions of the Independent Care Review.

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The opportunity is therefore not simply to recognise Plan 24–30 as one programme among many, but to use it as a practical demonstration of how the wider ambitions of Public Service Reform can be translated into coordinated delivery.

4. Where Plan 24–30 adds specificity

The principal difference between the two frameworks is not strategic intent but operational specificity.

The Public Service Reform Strategy establishes the direction of reform across government. Plan 24–30 provides a detailed delivery architecture that identifies the structural changes required to policy, legislation, funding, governance, data and accountability, together with the organisations responsible and the sequencing required through to 2030.

This level of specificity creates an opportunity to use keeping the promise as a national demonstrator for Public Service Reform. Rather than being viewed as one programme within a wider reform portfolio, Plan 24–30 provides a practical means of testing how reform can be translated into coordinated delivery, measurable progress and improved outcomes for people.

Plan 24–30 element	Purpose
Foundations of the promise	Define the outcomes that must be true for the promise to be kept
Route maps	Identify actions required
Meeting in the middle (pg.9)	Identify and understand the structural conditions for delivery
Promise Story of Progress	Demonstrates learning and progress

5. Opportunities for integrated delivery

The analysis suggests that the Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24–30 are not parallel programmes requiring separate implementation. Rather, they provide an opportunity to strengthen one another. The Public Service Reform Strategy establishes the direction of reform across government, while Plan 24–30 provides a mature, collaborative delivery framework capable of demonstrating how those ambitions can be translated into practice.

Several opportunities emerge.

Position Plan 24–30 as a demonstrator for Public Service Reform

Plan 24–30 provides one of Scotland's most developed cross-sector delivery frameworks. Developed collaboratively with over one hundred organisations, it already identifies the actions, sequencing, dependencies and responsibilities required to deliver complex system change. Using Plan 24–30 as a demonstrator would provide government with a practical means of testing the ambitions of the Public Service Reform Strategy—including prevention, integrated services, leadership, accountability, funding reform, data sharing and scrutiny—within a defined national reform programme.

Develop a common test for reform

The Public Service Reform Strategy and Plan 24–30 share a common focus on improving outcomes rather than organisational performance. This creates an opportunity to apply a consistent set of questions across reform activity.

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For example:

- Does this proposal help Scotland keep the promise by 2030?
- Does it shift investment towards prevention and earlier support?
- Does it strengthen relationships and improve the lived experience of children, families and care experienced adults?
- Does it reduce fragmentation and unnecessary complexity across the system?

Using a common reform test would strengthen consistency across portfolios while maintaining a clear focus on outcomes.

Align governance and delivery

The Public Service Reform Strategy establishes the broad direction of reform across government. Plan 24–30 provides detailed route maps describing the changes required across policy, funding, governance, workforce, data, scrutiny and family support.

Creating stronger alignment between Public Service Reform governance arrangements and these route maps would provide a clearer line of sight between strategic reform priorities and operational delivery.

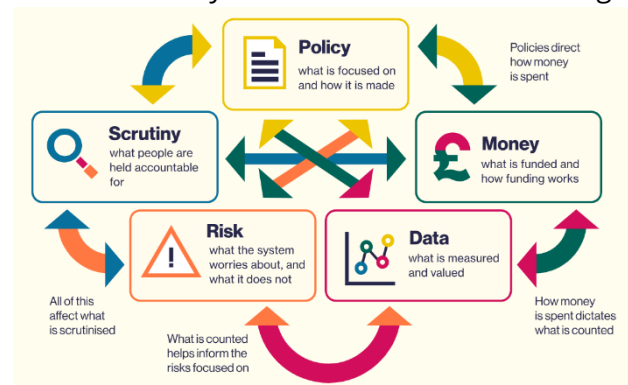
Make human experience the measure of successful reform

The Public Service Reform Strategy appropriately recognises the importance of efficiency and sustainability. Plan 24–30 reinforces that these should ultimately be judged by whether people's lives improve.

Success should therefore be assessed not only through financial savings or streamlined processes, but through evidence that children, families and care experienced adults experience greater stability, stronger relationships, earlier support, fewer unnecessary interventions and better long-term outcomes.

Use the structural barriers identified through Plan 24–30 as an organising framework. Plan 24–30 identifies five recurring structural barriers that consistently impede reform: fragmented policy, funding arrangements, data systems, approaches to risk, and scrutiny.

These are referred to as [Meeting in the middle](#) and rather than representing issues specific to keeping the promise, these provide a practical organising framework for wider Public Service Reform. They translate broad reform ambitions into tangible questions about how government structures either enable or inhibit better outcomes, helping move reform from high-level aspiration towards implementable system change.



6. Conclusion

The analysis presented in Appendices A and B suggests that Scotland's principal reform frameworks are complementary rather than competing. The NPF establishes the outcomes Scotland seeks to achieve. The Public Service Reform Strategy describes how government intends to organise itself to deliver those outcomes. Plan 24–30 provides a mature delivery framework through which those ambitions can be implemented and tested in practice.

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The remaining challenge is therefore not one of strategic alignment but of structural integration.

Strengthening the relationships between policy, funding, governance, legislation, data, accountability and scrutiny would enable keeping the promise to act as a practical demonstration of whole-system Public Service Reform. The evidence demonstrating why these reforms are required is presented in Appendices C and D.



Appendix C: Recurring systemic failures in safeguarding: evidence from Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections (2015–2025)

Purpose

This appendix examines a decade of Care Inspectorate Learning Reviews (formerly Significant Case Reviews and Initial Case Reviews) and Joint Inspections of Services for Children and Young People at Risk of Harm to identify recurring systemic barriers affecting safeguarding and children's services.

1. Introduction

Although Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections are undertaken for different purposes, this analysis shows both consistently identify the same underlying structural weaknesses. Learning Reviews are triggered by a catastrophic experience within the system and examine the circumstances surrounding serious harm or death to identify learning for the wider system. They operate from the position of focusing on the person at the centre. Joint Inspections happen routinely and focus on the system, assessing how effectively local systems and structures are functioning in practice.

Viewed together, they demonstrate that recurring failures, in both experience and structure, rarely arise from isolated professional error. Rather, they reflect persistent weaknesses in how systems share information, understand risk, coordinate action and maintain accountability over time. These are the same structural issues addressed through Plan 24–30.

2. Common findings across safeguarding scrutiny

Although not identical, there is very strong alignment:

Recurring Structural Issue	Learning Reviews	Joint Inspections	Relationship to Plan 24-30
Information sharing and use of data	Information is not consistently shared, brought together or analysed to develop a coherent understanding of risk.	Weaknesses in information sharing, recording and use of intelligence across agencies limit effective safeguarding.	Reinforces the need for improved data and information sharing, common understanding of need, and systems that support integrated decision-making.
Assessment of risk and need	Risk assessments often fail to recognise cumulative harm, escalating concerns or hidden risk, resulting in delayed or ineffective responses.	Assessment of risk and need is inconsistent, with variable quality of analysis and planning.	Supports Plan 24–30's emphasis on earlier intervention, relational practice and responding to cumulative adversity rather than isolated incidents.
Multi-agency leadership and coordination	Multiple agencies are involved but responsibilities, leadership and follow-	Partnership working is inconsistent at both strategic and operational levels,	Reinforces the need for stronger cross-system governance, clear accountability and

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	through are often unclear.	with weaknesses in shared accountability.	coordinated delivery across organisations.
Planning and oversight	Plans are not consistently implemented, reviewed or escalated when circumstances change.	Plans are not always outcome-focused or regularly reviewed, reducing their effectiveness.	Supports clearer delivery planning, shared accountability and stronger oversight of progress and outcomes.
Prevention and early intervention	Learning Reviews frequently demonstrate missed opportunities to intervene before harm escalates, particularly where cumulative neglect is present.	Joint Inspections place significant emphasis on whether families receive timely help before concerns reach crisis point.	Reinforces the central role of prevention and whole-family support within Plan 24–30 and the Public Service Reform Strategy.
Professional challenge and organisational learning	Professionals do not always challenge decisions, escalate concerns or revisit assumptions as risks change.	Governance, quality assurance and professional oversight do not consistently identify or respond to emerging issues.	Supports the need for cultures of learning, reflective practice and accountability that enable challenge and continuous improvement.
Children's lived experience	Reviews increasingly identify failures to understand the lived experience and cumulative impact of adversity despite significant professional involvement.	Inspections examine whether children and families are listened to and whether their views influence planning and decision-making.	Reinforces Plan 24–30's emphasis on relationships, rights, participation and understanding what matters to children, families and care experienced adults.
Workforce and system capacity	Workforce pressures, supervision and organisational context are recognised as contributing factors, although rarely the primary focus.	Workforce capacity, supervision, leadership and training are assessed more explicitly as determinants of effective safeguarding.	Supports the route maps relating to workforce, leadership and creating the conditions in which relational practice can flourish.

Put simply: the factors that appear after a tragedy or serious incident are often the same factors inspectors identify in routine system inspections before a tragedy occurs.

3. Evidence from Learning Reviews

The Care Inspectorate's reviews (child protection, adult protection) repeatedly identifying the same types of system failures, not generally a single practitioner error but instead point to weaknesses in how agencies work together, assess risk, and respond over time.

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Information sharing and communication failures

One of the most consistent findings is that important information held by different agencies is not shared, not shared quickly enough, or is not brought together into a coherent picture of risk. Relevant concerns may be known by several services, but no one agency develops a full understanding of the person's circumstances.

Weak assessment and analysis of risk

Reviews repeatedly highlight shortcomings in:

- recognising escalating risk
- analysing cumulative concerns
- professional curiosity
- understanding chronic neglect, self-neglect, coercion, or hidden harm
- converting information into effective risk assessment and planning.

Fragmented multi-agency coordination

Many reviews find that agencies were involved but lacked clear leadership, coordination, or accountability. Cases can become complex, with multiple professionals involved but uncertainty about:

- who is leading
- who is responsible for follow-up
- whether actions have actually been completed.

Problems with the "lead professional" or coordinating role

In child protection reviews particularly, recurring learning concerns the effectiveness of the lead professional, named person, or equivalent coordinating function. Reviews have found that coordination responsibilities are sometimes unclear or inconsistently exercised.

Failure to recognise cumulative harm and neglect

Neglect repeatedly emerges as a major theme in learning reviews involving children. Rather than responding to a pattern of concerns over time, agencies can become focused on individual incidents and miss the cumulative impact of long-term neglect or adversity.

Inadequate recording, planning, and follow-through

Another recurring issue is that plans are made but:

- actions are not clearly assigned,
- timescales are unclear,
- reviews are delayed,
- outcomes are not monitored effectively.

This can create a gap between identifying risk and actually reducing it.

Escalation and challenge are insufficient

Reviews frequently note situations where professionals had concerns but did not escalate them strongly enough, challenge other agencies, or revisit decisions when circumstances changed. This can lead to "drift" in high-risk cases.

Service transitions and system complexity

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Risk can increase during transitions between services (for example, child-to-adult services, hospital discharge, changes in social work involvement, or movement between localities). Reviews often identify gaps in continuity and oversight during these periods.

Overall pattern

The strongest recurring message from Care Inspectorate learning reviews is that serious harm rarely results from a complete absence of professional involvement. Instead, failures tend to arise when:

1. information is fragmented,
2. risk is not analysed holistically,
3. agencies do not coordinate effectively,
4. cumulative harm is underestimated, and
5. plans are not actively monitored and escalated when risk increases.

Organisations striving to keep the promise or strengthen their safeguarding practice, these themes are often translated into four priority improvement areas: information sharing, risk assessment, multi-agency leadership, and response to neglect/cumulative harm

4. Insights from Joint Inspections

Joint inspections tend to place greater emphasis on:

Strategic leadership and governance

Inspections frequently examine whether:

- leaders have a shared vision
- partnership structures are effective
- performance data is being used well
- quality assurance identifies problems early

Learning Reviews often uncover governance weaknesses indirectly, but joint inspections assess them explicitly.

Early help and prevention

Joint inspections repeatedly ask:

- Are families getting support before crisis?
- Is there effective early intervention?
- Are universal services identifying concerns?

Learning Reviews typically begin once significant harm has occurred, so they are less focused on prevention systems as a whole.

Children's participation and voice

A recurring theme in inspection reports is whether:

- children are listened to
- their views influence planning
- practitioners understand lived experience

Learning Reviews increasingly examine this but historically have focused more on professional decision-making than participation.

Workforce capacity and supervision

Joint inspections often identify:

- staffing pressures
- turnover

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- supervision quality
- training gaps

Learning Reviews sometimes note these factors, but usually as contributing conditions rather than primary findings.

One important distinction

Learning Reviews often reveal a deeper issue that can be harder to see in inspections:

Agencies shared information and completed procedures, but nobody truly understood the child's or adult's lived experience and the cumulative impact of harm.

This theme - sometimes described as a failure of professional curiosity, analysis, or seeing the whole picture - has become increasingly prominent in Scottish Learning Reviews.

Joint inspections increasingly look for this too, particularly through case-file reading and talking to children and families, but Learning Reviews tend to expose it more starkly because they examine cases where outcomes were particularly poor.

Comparing the two bodies of evidence, identifies the recurring "red flags" that appear in both:

1. Fragmented information
2. Weak analysis of risk
3. Poor multi-agency coordination
4. Insufficient focus on cumulative harm and neglect
5. Lack of professional challenge and escalation
6. Weak oversight of plans and outcomes

If a thematic analysis was to be developed across both Care Inspectorate Learning Reviews and Joint Inspection reports, those six themes would account for a large proportion of the recurring findings over the last decade. The main additional themes from inspections would be leadership/governance, early intervention, participation, and workforce capacity.

5. Synthesis

Taken together, Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections demonstrate a striking consistency in the barriers that prevent children, young people, adults and families from receiving the right support at the right time. While the two forms of scrutiny have different purposes, they repeatedly identify the same underlying weaknesses in how systems are organised and how agencies work together. A consistent finding is that serious harm rarely results from a complete absence of professional involvement. More commonly, multiple agencies are engaged, but information is fragmented, risk is not understood holistically, responsibilities are unclear, and opportunities for earlier intervention are missed. These failures emerge over time through weaknesses in coordination, leadership, accountability and system design, rather than through isolated errors by individual practitioners.

This pattern has remained consistent over the last decade.

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The recurrence of the same themes across different local areas, different forms of scrutiny and different types of case suggests that these are structural rather than episodic challenges. They cannot be addressed solely through additional guidance, training or procedural change. Instead, they require sustained reform of the systems that shape how services are planned, governed, funded, scrutinised and delivered.

The consistency of findings across Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections suggests that Scotland's safeguarding challenges are primarily systemic rather than episodic. The recurring barriers identified over the past decade closely mirror the structural issues addressed through Plan 24–30. This provides independent evidence that the reforms required to keep the promise are not unique to one policy area, but reflect long-standing system-wide challenges that must be addressed if lasting improvement is to be achieved. Appendix D demonstrates that these issues are not confined to safeguarding but recur across wider public services.



Appendix D: Recurring structural barriers in Scottish public services: evidence from Audit Scotland performance audits

Purpose

This appendix examines Audit Scotland performance audits to determine whether similar structural barriers recur across wider Scottish public services.

1. Introduction

This appendix examines recurring themes emerging from Audit Scotland's performance audits over the past decade. It does not present a systematic review of all Audit Scotland performance audits. Rather, it provides a thematic analysis of recurring findings emerging across performance audits published over the last decade, including audits relating to health and social care, local government, community justice, digital transformation, children's services, preventative spending and wider public service reform. Its purpose is not to assess individual audits, but to identify common patterns that appear consistently across sectors and over time.

Audit Scotland's performance audits examine whether public bodies are using public resources effectively, efficiently and economically to improve outcomes for people. Unlike financial audits, they assess whether public services are well governed, deliver value for money, use evidence effectively and demonstrate measurable improvement over time.

Although individual audits focus on different policy areas - including health and social care, local government, education, justice, housing, digital transformation and children's services - a consistent set of structural barriers emerges across them.

Viewed collectively, these findings suggest that many of Scotland's public service challenges arise not from the absence of policy ambition but from persistent weaknesses in implementation, governance, accountability, evidence and long-term planning. These are the same structural barriers addressed through Plan 24-30 and reflected in the Public Service Reform Strategy.

2. Recurring themes across Audit Scotland performance audits

When viewed collectively over the past decade, a consistent set of weaknesses appears across sectors.

Recurring structural barrier	Typical Audit Scotland findings	Relationship to Plan 24-30
Outcomes and implementation	Reforms often begin with strong policy intent but lack clear implementation plans, milestones, performance measures and evidence of impact.	Reinforces the need for route maps, sequencing, shared outcomes and clear delivery responsibilities.
Leadership, governance and accountability	Weak governance, unclear responsibilities and partnership arrangements where accountability is diffuse.	Supports stronger cross-system governance, shared accountability and leadership for outcomes.

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Data and evidence	Weak performance information, inconsistent data, limited evaluation and poor evidence of impact.	Reinforces the need for meaningful data, shared information and the Promise Story of Progress.
Funding and prevention	Short-term funding cycles and continued investment in crisis response inhibit preventative reform.	Supports long-term investment, prevention and shifting resources upstream.
Partnership working	Collaboration is expected but often undermined by fragmented responsibilities and competing organisational priorities.	Reinforces the need for integrated planning and coordinated delivery across sectors.
Workforce and organisational capacity	Workforce pressures, leadership capacity and capability constrain reform.	Supports investment in leadership, workforce development and relational practice.
Performance and improvement	Organisations frequently struggle to demonstrate improved outcomes despite significant reform activity.	Reinforces the importance of measuring outcomes rather than activity and strengthening continuous learning.

3. Relationship to findings from safeguarding scrutiny

The themes emerging from Audit Scotland's work closely mirror those identified through Care Inspectorate Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections. While the focus and emphasis differs, significant overlap exists in the barriers identified across the various forms of scrutiny:

Care Inspectorate Learning Reviews	Joint Inspections	Audit Scotland Performance Audits
Fragmented information and weak analysis	Weak information sharing and recording	Weak performance information, data and evidence
Poor coordination and unclear leadership	Weak partnership governance	Diffuse accountability and governance
Missed opportunities to respond to escalating risk	Insufficient early intervention	Failure to shift resources towards prevention
Weak planning and follow-through	Inconsistent planning and review	Gap between policy ambition and implementation
Failure to understand lived experience and outcomes	Outcomes not consistently improved	Limited evidence that reforms improve outcomes

4. Synthesis: recurring structural barriers to reform

Audit Scotland's performance audits focus on the implementation of reform across complex public service systems and demonstrate remarkable consistency in the structural barriers affecting public service reform across Scotland. If one underlying issue runs through many performance audits, it is that Scotland is often better at designing ambitious reforms than demonstrating their implementation, impact and value.

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Across sectors, Audit Scotland repeatedly identifies:

1. ambitious policy intentions;
2. complex partnership arrangements;
3. unclear accountability;
4. weak performance evidence;
5. insufficient long-term planning; and
6. limited ability to demonstrate improved outcomes.

Although individual audits examine different policy areas, these same issues recur repeatedly: ambitious policy intent is not consistently translated into implementation; governance and accountability are fragmented; evidence of impact is weak; funding arrangements inhibit prevention; and partnership working lacks sufficient clarity and coordination.

Unlike Learning Reviews and Joint Inspections which examine safeguarding systems, Audit Scotland considers the performance of public services across government. The recurrence of these themes across such a wide range of sectors suggests that they are not challenges unique to children's services or keeping the promise. Rather, they represent enduring characteristics of the wider public service system.

The close alignment between these recurring findings and the structural barriers identified through Plan 24–30 provides independent validation of the diagnosis underpinning work to keep the promise. The challenges identified through Plan 24–30 are not unique to children's services or care experience. They are reflected consistently in scrutiny of public services across Scotland. This suggests that the reforms required to keep the promise address wider systemic weaknesses and that progress in implementing Plan 24–30 has the potential to contribute to broader Public Service Reform objectives.