



SUMMARY: Prevention: from ambition to practice **A package of advice, context and proposals for discussion**

Advice on

How Scotland can move from long-standing ambition for prevention to a practical system for making different decisions about policy, investment, delivery and disinvestment - and how a Prevention Investment Framework could help.

These three papers trace the development of thinking: strategic investment : disinvestment work undertaken in 2024; current advice on the Prevention Investment Framework; and practical proposals for how that work could begin. Since this work began, the Scottish Government Prevention Unit has published its [Areas of Shared Interest](#), setting out the emerging scope of the Prevention Investment Framework and identifying many of the same unresolved questions around investment, demand, cross-boundary working, evidence and funding. This package is intended as a contribution to resolving those questions in practice.

Provided to

Scottish Government

Provided on

The Cabinet Sub Committee paper was shared in November 2024 and the Advice Note and discussion paper were shared on 7th October 2026.

Why this matters

Scotland has argued for prevention for more than a decade, but public services and public finance remain largely organised around individual services, organisations and annual budgets.

Work to develop the Prevention Investment Framework creates an opportunity to change how decisions are made across policy, money, data and delivery in pursuit of shared outcomes - rather than simply identifying or funding preventative activity.

The work brought together here provides a substantial foundation from which to develop, test and apply that approach.

My advice

Develop the Prevention Investment Framework as a driver of Public Service Reform, not as another funding programme or another framework explaining why prevention matters.

It should enable Scotland to:

- define the outcome being pursued, for whom, where and by when;
- understand the policies, systems and current expenditure affecting that outcome;
- identify where existing spending is preventing harm and where it is managing the consequences of failure elsewhere;
- identify the structural and systemic changes required across policy, legislation, funding, workforce, data, planning, delivery and scrutiny;



- develop propositions capable of investment that make clear what needs to be invested, by whom, for how long and how responsibility and accountability will be shared;
- plan from the outset where successful preventative investment should reduce demand and enable resources to be released, redirected or ceased; and
- use evidence about people's experience, outcomes, demand and expenditure to test whether change is happening as expected.

Planned disinvestment must not be confused with cuts. Resources should only be released or redirected where evidence shows that demand has reduced, different provision is working, or existing activity is no longer required.

Who needs to act

Further development requires Scottish Government leadership and active involvement, including access to budgets, management information and policy, finance, data and analytical expertise. The earlier strategic investment : disinvestment work had reached the point where it could not progress without that involvement.

This cannot be owned by finance alone. Policy, finance, data, delivery and scrutiny need to work together, nationally and locally, alongside public bodies, local partners and providers.

Philanthropic and socially motivated investment may provide transitional or bridging finance, but cannot substitute for the state's responsibility for public services.

What needs to happen

The Prevention Investment Framework should be developed through application, rather than designed in isolation. This means:

- connecting policy and money around the full pattern of expenditure and failure demand associated with an outcome;
- recognising where investment in one part of the system avoids costs elsewhere and over time;
- distinguishing cost avoidance, cashable savings and resources that can genuinely be released or redirected;
- designing investment and planned disinvestment together, with explicit assumptions about timescale and demand;
- developing pooled and cross-boundary investment where responsibility, cost and benefit sit in different organisations;
- using appropriate forms of finance for the change required;
- using real people, places and problems to develop and refine the Framework;
- starting from intersections between policy areas rather than separate programmes; and
- agreeing an initial application through which the approach can be tested. Keeping the promise, Plan 24–30 and Intensive Family Support provide relevant experience and potential opportunities.



Status: advice provided / Foundation established / Next steps to be agreed

The Scottish Government has committed to developing a Prevention Investment Framework. The work published here demonstrates that it does not need to start from scratch: the 2024 strategic investment : disinvestment work provides a methodological foundation, with the subsequent work showing how it could move towards practical application.

No Ministerial or Cabinet agreement has yet been reached on the proposed approach, governance, four-function model or initial application. Relevant work elsewhere, including the Justice Social Impact Partnership, can provide further learning.

The test is whether the Prevention Investment Framework changes actual decisions about policy, expenditure, investment and disinvestment - rather than simply reinforcing the case for prevention.