



SUMMARY: Intensive Family Support

Advice on

Making Intensive Family Support available to children and families who need it, whenever they need it, for as long as they need it, wherever they live in Scotland - and using this as a practical cross-government priority for keeping the promise, prevention and Public Service Reform.

Provided to

The First Minister, with the proposition intended to support further discussion with Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, Scottish Government officials and delivery partners.

Provided on

26th June 2026.

Why this matters

Scotland already knows a great deal about what effective family support looks like. The problem is that intensive, relational and persistent support is not consistently available, and access can still depend on where a family lives.

Intensive Family Support can help families before difficulties escalate, enable more children to remain safely with their families and communities where possible, strengthen support around children who are already in family-based care, and help identify earlier when a child cannot safely remain at home.

It is also a practical test of wider reform. Families experience health, education, housing, justice, social security, addiction services, family support and the 'care system' together, even though government and services often organise them separately. Intensive Family Support therefore cannot be delivered successfully by one service, one budget or one Minister.

My advice

Make Intensive Family Support a national, cross-government reform priority, with the objective that children and families who need intensive support can access it consistently across Scotland.

This should not mean creating one standardised service model. Government should establish a shared national understanding of who Intensive Family Support is for, the outcomes it should achieve and the expectations for implementation, while allowing delivery to reflect local circumstances.

Delivery should be based on the family support principles set out in the promise: support that is community-based, responsive and timely, strengths-based, empowering, flexible, holistic and relational, therapeutic, non-stigmatising, patient and persistent, and underpinned by children's rights. Those principles need to shape not only frontline practice but how support is designed, funded, commissioned, governed and evaluated.



Who needs to act

Scottish Government needs to provide national leadership and create the conditions for implementation cross-government, including aligning policy, funding, accountability, workforce and reform activity across portfolios.

Local government, health, the third sector and wider delivery partners also need to act collectively to organise support around children and families rather than organisational boundaries. Existing national and local structures need clear roles, responsibilities and implementation accountability around the shared objective.

What needs to happen

To move from examples of effective Intensive Family Support to consistent availability across Scotland:

- Cabinet should establish Intensive Family Support as a cross-government reform priority, with a shared expectation about the support children and families should be able to access;
- Scotland needs a clear national understanding of the population Intensive Family Support should reach and the outcomes it should achieve, while retaining flexibility in how places deliver it;
- existing policies and initiatives relating to family support need to be brought together so national programmes reinforce rather than compete with each other;
- funding for family support, prevention and child poverty needs to become less fragmented and more long term, with resources increasingly able to follow children and families rather than individual programmes;
- the workforce capacity and conditions required for intensive, relational and potentially out-of-hours support need to be identified and addressed;
- barriers arising from commissioning, procurement, reporting, information sharing and performance arrangements need to be removed where they prevent services organising around families;
- Government needs a cross-government transition plan setting out how investment can move progressively towards early and intensive support while essential existing provision continues;
- evidence should be used to identify where unmet need is greatest and where existing effective provision can be expanded at pace; and
- success should be measured by what children and families actually experience - whether support comes earlier, is more consistent, relational and coordinated, and prevents avoidable crisis - rather than by activity or expenditure alone.

Status

Advice provided / Response received / Action underway / Further action required

The advice was provided in advance of publication of Programme for Government, recommending Intensive Family Support as a priority inclusion. The Scottish Government subsequently responded directly via letter and the Programme for Government committed to ensuring that learning about the value of Intensive Family Support is embedded within ongoing work to keep the promise. My Halfway Point Report makes clear this is an opportunity to move the proposition towards implementation and to test the funding, governance and delivery conditions required for support to become consistently available.



Further action is still required. The test is not whether Intensive Family Support appears in a national commitment, but whether children and families across Scotland can access the right support when they need it, with the funding, workforce, accountability and delivery conditions necessary to sustain it.