



SUMMARY: Local Area Visits: Initial Reflections

About this report

Between June and November 2026, I am visiting all 32 local authority areas to hear directly from those working to keep the promise and, critically, from children, families and care experienced adults.

This is the first report of four and reflects on visits to North Lanarkshire, Shetland, Midlothian, Fife and Aberdeenshire. Five visits cannot provide a picture of change across Scotland, but they are beginning to bring some important questions into sharper focus.

Shared with

Scottish Government, COSLA and Solace

Shared on

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Why this matters

Keeping the promise depends on national ambition translating into coherent local change that is felt in children's and families' everyday lives. These visits are testing how that is happening in practice: what is helping, what is getting in the way, and where responsibility for further change sits locally, collectively and nationally.

What is emerging so far

Is local activity adding up to coherent delivery?

There is strong commitment to keeping the promise and significant work underway. But the question is whether individual organisational activity is being brought together into a locally-owned, multi-agency delivery plan through to 2030 and beyond. Plan 24–30 provides the shared national framework for doing that, using existing planning and partnership arrangements rather than creating new ones.

Is change being felt in day-to-day lives?

Relationships have been one of the strongest themes so far: between children and families and those who support them, across the workforce and between organisations. But good individual services do not necessarily add up to a good experience. The test remains whether help comes earlier, relationships are stronger, people are listened to and respected, children experience greater stability and belonging, and lives are better.

Are the conditions for change in place?

The visits are bringing into focus the conditions that enable or constrain delivery, including workforce, funding, commissioning, provision and the balance between meeting current need and investing in prevention. They are also helping distinguish what can be changed locally, what requires organisations to act together and what depends on national decisions.



What happens next

These are initial reflections, not conclusions. The remaining visits will test where these themes recur, where they do not and why.

A particular focus will be where responsibility for further change sits: whether existing local and national levers are being fully used, where organisations need to combine their authority and resources, and where the conditions for delivery themselves need to change.

The purpose is not to judge or compare individual places, but to understand what Scotland can learn collectively about what helps change happen, what continues to get in the way and where responsibility for the next change sits.

Status: visits underway / further learning to follow

This report captures early reflections from the first five local area visits and is not intended as a final assessment. The themes identified will be tested and developed through the remaining visits, with further reports to follow.