

Social Work Scotland

Response to Promise Scotland Call For Views Plan 2024-30 Methodology

25th August 2023

Introduction:

Social Work Scotland is the professional body for social work leaders. Our membership spans local authority and third sector organisations across the range of social work provision, and we work closely with our partners to shape policy and practice and improve the quality and experience of social services. Social Work Scotland as an organisation and across our members are committed to the Promise and improvement in the children's care system, and we welcome this opportunity to comment and be involved in the development of the methodology for Plan 2024-30.

The Promise is an ambitious and whole scale change with many threads. It is reassuring that despite a challenging context over the period of the first plan, that significant progress has been made to keep the Promise in Scotland. This provides a strong foundation for ongoing improvement. Of particular note is the embedding across the sector of inclusion and listening to the voice of young people and their families, changes to language and approach which are transforming the experience of children and young people, and progress with legislative changes needed to enable some of the fundamental commitments such as maintaining the connection of brothers and sisters and removing young people from detention in YOI. That this has occurred in a context of a global pandemic with all the impact this continues to have on the lives of children and families, and with workforce and financial pressures not seen before is a testimony to the commitment of the sector to the Promise agenda, and improvement in the lives of our children.

Do the principles above include everything they need to? Reading them, what would you like to add or adapt to strengthen?

The principles are broad and as such cover what we would expect to see – a plan rooted in the needs of the care community, a single ‘route map’ to take us up to 2023, and common understanding on how this will be measured. Given the challenges around workforce and the criticality of workforce to meeting the goals of the Promise we would query if an additional principle around this area would be helpful and add weight to ensuring that the right conditions are there to meet the Promise by 2030.

The Promise rightly noted the complexity of the legislative and policy context of our Scottish care system. This is not only confusing for children but challenging for practitioners who must operate within that legislative context. There has unfortunately been no let-up in the bombardment of new initiatives, legislation and policy impacting on provision of services to children and families. This, along with a lack of attention to the importance of implementation time and support, means that the sector cannot assimilate the level of change, thus reducing the impact of the policy intent on children and families. A principle which commits to clear, simple, and coordinated approaches to meeting the goals of the Promise would be welcomed by our members and, we believe, children and families. This would also provide a guide for policy makers.

We would suggest that it is important that all the principles are developed with stakeholders in a manner which is easily understood by them all - professionals, carers, families, and young people. There should be an avoidance of jargon – old or new – and how they are measured should be laid out in a manner which is achievable, meaningful and transparent.

Co-devising a six-year Plan marks a change from the proposed approach of two 3-year Plans. What do you think about this?

Change takes time, and we know that transformational and cultural change in particular needs more time to enable building of capacity, engagement of hearts and minds and embedding of the change. Given this Social Work Scotland is supportive

of the move to a six-year plan, but with the cautionary note that care is taken with oversight of progress with the Plan to ensure that this is appropriate and effectively managed.

Plan 24-30 needs to capture the barriers and challenges so that they can be overcome. What do you think they are, and why?

There are many barriers and challenges. The three main areas are:

- 1. Workforce:** As the social work leadership organisations, Social Work Scotland has significant knowledge and oversight of the challenges in relating to recruitment and retention of social workers. Our Setting the Bar report highlighted this, as did the follow up report specifically linked to front line staff. (<https://socialworkscotland.org/reports/settingthebar/> <https://socialworkscotland.org/reports/settingthebar2/>) There is also local evidence of staff leaving children and families to move to other areas of social work due to the particular pressures in children's work. All areas are struggling with recruitment, and some are operating a 60-70% capacity. As the Promise recognised, a well-equipped workforce is critical to ability to meet the Promise. With the above context, much energy is being given to how the profession can be made attractive and the workforce supported and engaged. the Promise cannot be met without a strong statutory and charitable sector. Plan 2024-30 needs to acknowledge and support this work.
- 2. Financial Context.** We operate in a climate of financial pressure with increasing need and increasing pressure on resources available to meet those needs. This cannot be ignored. Change requires resource, and it is critical that the funding related to the new plan is focused appropriately and effectively, utilising some evaluation of whether the way funding for plan 21-24 has been managed has resulted in the desired changes.
- 3. Level of change** within the sector, and capacity to manage this. As noted above, the Promise rightly acknowledged the complexity of the legislative and policy context of our Scottish care system. The importance of cohesive and

coordinated planning and development of policy is understood, but legislative and policy change continues to have a focus on specific areas, and there has been no let-up in the bombardment of new initiatives, legislation and policy impacting on provision of services to children and families. This, along with a lack of attention to the importance of implementation time and support, means that the sector cannot assimilate the level of change, thus reducing the impact of the policy intent on children and families. This needs to be addressed if the Promise goals are to be realised.

What would you like to see in Plan 24-30?

Social Work Scotland would like to see the following in Plan 2024-30

1. One of the frustrations for our members is the bombardment of individual initiatives, each with their own 'pot' of funding attached. To access that funding, a bidding process is involved, with expectations of transformational change in what is often a short period of time. Research tells us that this is rarely achievable. Our members note that the time involved in the bidding process is often out of proportion to the funding available, and the focus of the funding bid may be very specific.

Social Work Scotland would therefore like to see a commitment to a more productive funding approach in Plan 2024-30, and would ask that in developing this, there is engagement with the statutory sector and application of the knowledge from research organisations on what works best in achieving transformational change in this area.

2. Along with acknowledgment of the challenges and barriers in the sector, we would also like to see actions around assisting the sector in addressing those challenges, and particularly those related to the workforce, and level of change facing the sector. This should include leadership.
3. As noted earlier, inclusion of learning around implementation science and research on what works would be valued, and helpful in achieving the goals of the Plan.

4. Plan 2024-30 includes implementation of the national care service, in whatever ultimate form that takes. Regardless of the decision on inclusion or otherwise of children's services, this will have a massive impact on the children's workforce and service delivery. This should be acknowledged in the Plan, with inclusion of how national and local delivery of services will take account of the wider context.

5. In terms of resource, SWS would like to see a level of prioritisation of the activity needed to meet the Promise, with attention to what will make the biggest difference – not only specifically within the children's sector but also the areas which impact on children and families such as cost of living and poverty, and activities which could mitigate the impact of those features. This is implicit within the family support and early help work. We would like to see it explicitly feature in Plan 2024-30, with the inclusion of activities to for example build community capacity and utilise universal and local facilities.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

We would like to see the plan presented in a clear and easy to read and access format, which will benefit professionals, families, and children. Something acknowledging the work which has taken place over the lifespan of Plan 21 – 24 and the commitment of children, families, the workforce and local and national organisations and government to making it happen would be appreciated by the sector.

The Plan should also build on the positives and instil in those reading it an enthusiasm for progress, with clarity on where responsibility lies, how the Promise will support delivery and how progress will be shared.

For further information please contact:

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