

Scottish Social Work Partnership – working together to support social work across Scotland

Engagement pack to provide an update and short overview, and to inform the priorities and actions of the Scottish Social Work Partnership (Strategic Plan 2026–29)



Welcome

Thank you for taking time to engage with this pack. Your voice matters.

So much of social work is about relationships, with our colleagues and with the people we're supporting: the Scottish Social Work Partnership is committed to working collaboratively with the social work workforce and partners across Scotland to strengthen the workforce and ensure social work is valued, supported and sustainable, leading to improved outcomes for people in communities.

This engagement is part of a national conversation to better understand the experiences, challenges and aspirations of those working in social work today. Whether you're a student, newly qualified or have many years of experience, your insights will help shape the future of social work in Scotland.

We invite you to reflect, respond and share your views through the questions and survey provided. Your feedback will directly inform the priorities and actions of the Scottish Social Work Partnership.

Together we can build a stronger, more inclusive and more resilient social work workforce.





Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

About the Scottish Social Work Partnership

The Scottish Social Work Partnership brings together key national organisations with a shared commitment to strengthening social work in Scotland. We work collaboratively to support the workforce, influence policy, and promote the value of social work across sectors. Our current priorities are shaped by what the workforce has told us matters most: improving wellbeing, strengthening professional identity, supporting leadership at all levels, planning for a sustainable workforce and ensuring inclusive, meaningful career development. This engagement is part of our collective response to the needs and challenges previously outlined by the sector.

The partnership of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Scottish Government (the National Social Work Agency) and Social Work Scotland enables national and local government to work together on priorities to support the social work workforce, including **education and learning**, **professional governance and leadership**, and **workforce planning**, to begin to address what you have told us matters most.

The aim of the Scottish Social Work Partnership is to ensure Scotland has a skilled, supported and sustainable social work workforce; one that upholds human rights, promotes social justice, and discharges statutory duties on behalf of local government; and to harness evidence-informed practice, promote social work principles and reinforce the value of social work in all systems in which it operates.

The National Social Work Agency

The National Social Work Agency will lead excellence in social work, and will work in partnership with the social work profession, people with lived experience and partners to strengthen practice, elevate the profession and drive positive change. It will advise Scottish Ministers, drive national coordination of policy affecting social work and have oversight of national workforce planning, social work education and learning, and improvement priorities and national implementation support.



What's the difference between the Scottish Social Work Partnership and the National Social Work Agency?

The **Scottish Social Work Partnership** is a collaborative consensus-based partnership led by COSLA, the Scottish Government and Social Work Scotland that enables collaboration between national and local partners to ensure joined-up delivery and shared leadership across the sector.

It coordinates and aligns national and local efforts and activities for workforce improvement and is underpinned by a strategic plan for the social work workforce.

The **National Social Work Agency** will be a Scottish Government agency with formal authority and responsibility for leading and coordinating social work policy, improvement and professional standards, led by the National Chief Social Work Adviser (also Chief Executive of the National Social Work Agency).

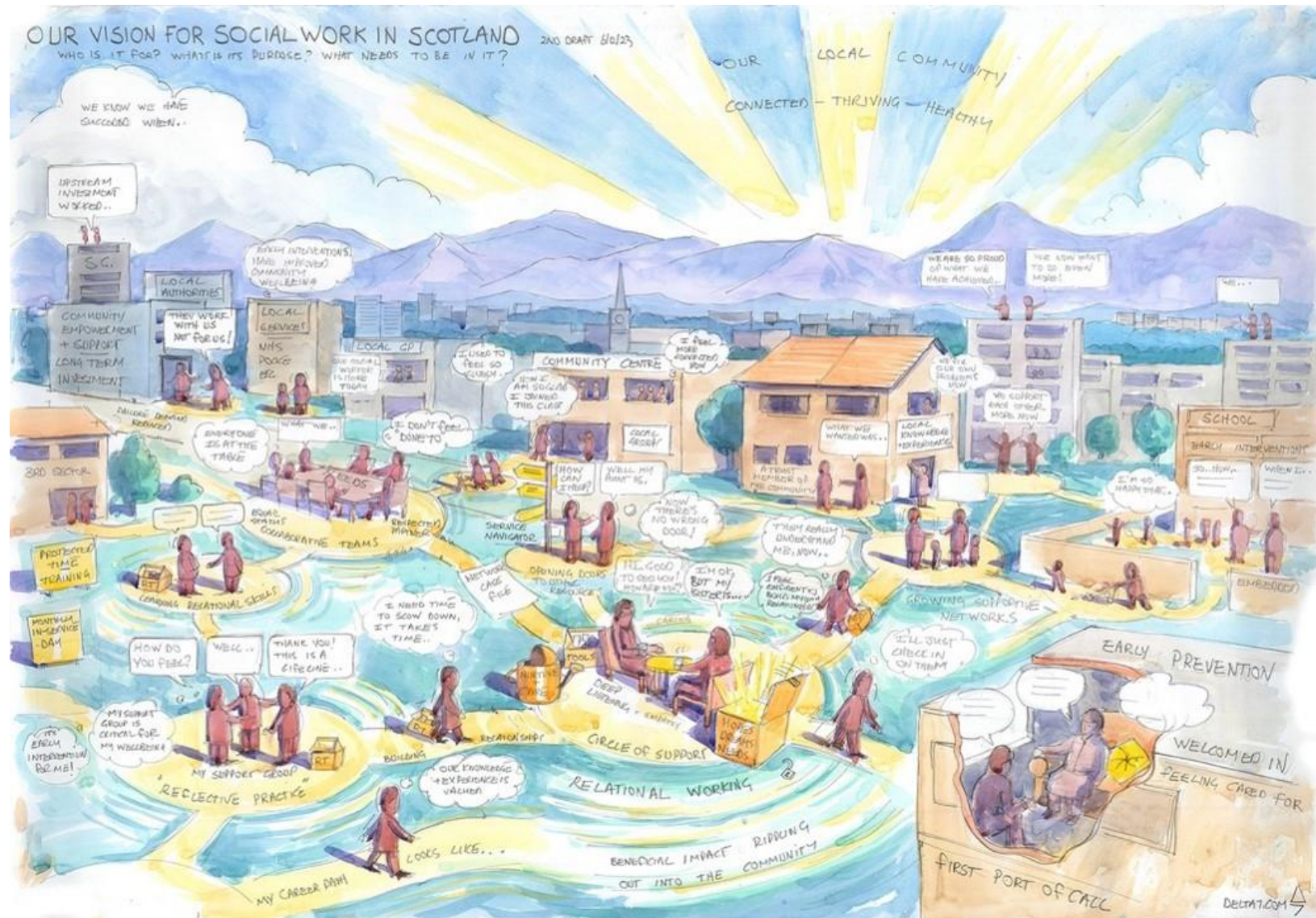
It will be impartial and lead excellence in social work through national leadership and oversight. The National Social Work Agency will be the national voice of social work.

A vision for social work in Scotland

Social work plays a vital role in supporting individuals, families, and communities. We are working towards a shared vision that recognises the value of the profession, strengthens its identity, and ensures it is equipped to meet Scotland's evolving needs.

Reflecting on your experience, consider:

- What does a strong and sustainable future for social work look like for you?
- What values and principles should underpin a vision for social work in Scotland?
- How can we better communicate the impact and importance of social work?
- What would you change in the draft vision picture below? (*This picture was created from engagement with social workers and sector partners as part of the National Social Work Agency Leadership & Culture workstream in December 2023.*)



Key themes for engagement

Scotland's social work workforce is facing increasing demand, growing complexity in the needs of individuals and communities, and challenges in recruitment and retention. To ensure the profession remains strong, sustainable, and responsive, we need to plan ahead, in partnership.

Informed by evidence, previous engagement with the social work workforce and the current context, the Scottish Social Work Partnership is taking action now. We are working together to develop and deliver lasting improvements across social work by improving wellbeing, strengthening professional identity, planning for a sustainable workforce, supporting leadership at all levels, and creating inclusive, meaningful career development.

Social work education and opportunities for learning

We are strengthening social work education and learning across Scotland, ensuring education and lifelong learning are central to professional development and confidence.

What success looks like (by end of 2025/26):

- agreed national and local supports for high-quality education and learning across the career continuum
- inclusive arrangements for educators, people with lived experience, students, social workers, and employers to shape learning
- collaborative planning and testing of new approaches to improve local professional learning

This is being led by the newly formed Education and Learning Delivery Group, which brings together partners from education, regulation, inspection, and practice to shape and deliver this work.

We want to understand how initial education and ongoing learning opportunities can be improved to support high-quality, reflective practice. Reflecting on your experience, consider:

- What learning opportunities have been most valuable in your career?
- Do you have preferred ways of learning that help you apply new knowledge into practice?
- What barriers do you face in accessing professional development?
- How could career pathways be improved?



Planning for a future social work workforce

We are working to build a clearer, more coordinated approach to workforce planning across social work, to better understand demand, and to take practical steps to secure a sustainable workforce for the future.

What success looks like (by end of 2025/26):

- a clear understanding of the profile of the workforce, using the data and insights to inform workforce planning
- an initial assessment of the demand for social workers
- a contextual assessment of the financial, economic, societal, geographic and other constraints facing the sector
- an articulation of the workforce planning and future workforce aspirations of the Scottish Social Work Partnership

This work will be led by the Workforce Planning Working Group, starting in early October 2025. The information we gather will help shape national discussions about a future national social work workforce strategy / plan.

We want to understand how local and national workforce planning can be improved to ensure a social work workforce that is sustainable and able to support the needs in communities. Reflecting on your experience, consider:

- What workforce challenges are most pressing in your area or service, and what is needed to address these challenges?
- What would make social work a more attractive and sustainable career?
- Are there local initiatives or ideas that could be tested to support recruitment and retention?

Professional governance and leadership of the workforce

We are working to improve clarity, consistency, and support for senior social work leaders, as strong governance and confident leadership are essential for a thriving social work workforce.

What success looks like (by end of 2025/26):

- a collective response to the *Review of social work governance and assurance in Scotland* (Care Inspectorate, May 2025) with agreed actions and shared responsibility for change
- development of a national professional and care governance framework, endorsed across all local areas
- proposed update to the Chief Social Work Officer Principles, Requirements and Guidance
- a development offer for senior social work leaders, including learning, mentoring and peer support



We want to understand the increasing complexity and system-wide change being experienced across social work and acknowledge that it's more important than ever that social workers, especially senior leaders, are well-supported and empowered. Reflecting on your experience, consider:

- Do you feel your voice is heard in decision-making?
- What does good leadership look like in social work?
- How can frontline workers influence policy and practice?

How to respond

Your voice matters.

The views of social work students, registered social workers and those currently in practice, as well as people who use social work services, are central to the work of the Scottish Social Work Partnership. By working together and drawing on the collective knowledge, experience and skills across the profession, we can drive meaningful and lasting change. This collaborative approach ensures that the actions we take are grounded in real-world insight and shaped by those who know the work best.

You can help strengthen social work that is vital to so many people and communities in Scotland.

- You can tell us your views by completing our online survey <https://forms.office.com/e/HR0aKRQy8h>
- You can email us with your feedback at NSWAcommunications@gov.scot
- You can sign up to keep up-to-date with national progress and developments <https://forms.office.com/e/ER4WkYhK1F>
- You can join our online engagement sessions. Whether you're a student, newly qualified or have many years of experience, your insights will help shape the future of social work in Scotland.
- You can use the reflective questions (see **key themes for engagement**) in a group setting to support discussion with colleagues. We would be pleased to receive group feedback via email NSWAcommunications@gov.scot



What happens next?

We are at the start of the Scottish Social Work Partnership journey.

We want to create a dialogue with social workers, from students to leaders.

- We want to expand existing networks.
- We want to provide new opportunities to influence change.
- We want the levers of joint working across national and local systems to enable support and bring real benefits for the whole social work workforce.

Hearing from those working in social work is central to shaping how we engage more widely. Your insights will help us involve other partners and employers across the sector in meaningful ways.

We will:

- gather feedback via email, survey and engagement sessions until 31 December 2025
- analyse and evaluate the feedback in January and February 2026
- publish a draft strategic plan for comment in March 2026
- publish our first final strategic plan in May 2026

Your feedback will be anonymised and will be analysed. It will be used to shape the future workplan and actions of the Scottish Social Work Partnership, including Strategic Plan 2026–29, and future national developments to deliver improvement across social work.

We will publish an engagement report alongside our strategic plan. It will outline who we spoke to, what we heard and the feedback we received, and how that feedback has shaped our strategic plan. We will also explain any suggested changes we are unable to include – and tell you why.

The principal partners are committed to principles of transparency, integrity, objectivity and impartiality in all Scottish Social Work Partnership activity, including communications and engagement. Email NSWAcommunications@gov.scot for our privacy statement.



Keeping up to date with national developments to support social work

- You can register to receive regular updates / newsletters from the Scottish Social Work Partnership
<https://forms.office.com/e/ER4WkYhK1F>
- The Social Work Policy Panel, is a six-weekly online session. It is free to attend (SASW/BASW membership is not required) and each sessions counts as 1 hour of continuous professional learning. Here is a link for the next / future session, where you can register to attend [Events | BASW](#).

Resources

Some of the evidence that has shaped the direction of the Scottish Social Work Partnership.

Title	Link	Description
Rural social work in Scotland (Iriss, April 2019)	Rural social work in Scotland Iriss	Iriss evidence summary Insight 47 looking at the particularities of the rural context, the policy framework, and goes on to describe approaches that can be used to help social workers living and working in rural Scotland.
Keeping the Promise: What's needed to deliver change in social work practice (UNISON Scotland, November 2021)	Keep-the-Promise-UNISON-Nov-21.pdf	Report outlining the findings of a UNISON members survey of local authority children and families social work teams across Scotland.
UNISON manifesto for social workers (UNISON, March 2022)	26731.pdf	Unison 'Stand up for social work'. Calling on government and employers to support social workers
Setting the Bar (Social Work Scotland, June 2022)	Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers - Social Work Scotland	Findings from SWS Survey - Setting the Bar set out to establish an evidence-based indicative caseload limit for social work staff in Scotland, with consideration given as to how this might be used.
Setting the Bar 2: Taking the Wheel (Social Work Scotland, December 2022)	Setting the Bar 2: 'Taking the wheel' - Social Work Scotland	SWS focus group following up from 'Setting the Bar'

One Deal for Social Work Campaign (SASW, November 2023)	One Deal for Social Work Campaign Launched by SASW BASW	One Deal for Social Work Campaign – calling for nationally agreed terms and conditions for social workers across Scotland.
Children's Services Reform Research Concluding Report (CELCIS, December 2023)	CSRR Concluding Report - CELCIS - 13 December 2023.pdf	CELCIS was asked by the Scottish Government to carry out this research study with the aim of gathering evidence to inform decision-making about how best to deliver children's services in Scotland in light of the proposed introduction of the National Care Service, and its commitment to keep The Promise of the Independent Care Review
National Care Service: Justice Social Work research (Scottish Government, January 2024)	Supporting documents - National Care Service: Justice Social Work research - gov.scot	Summary of research undertaken by Prof. Beth Weaver in 2023. It explores the views of Justice Social Work staff, partners and people experiencing the justice system about its strengths and weaknesses, and asked their views on potential NCS inclusion
Leadership in social work (Iriss/Social Work Scotland, February 2024)	Leadership in social work Iriss	This report presents the findings from research exploring the current practice context of social work leadership in Scotland, through the perspectives of social workers from across the profession, with the aim of better understanding how Social Work Scotland and its partners, including Iriss, can support developing and existing leaders in future.
What needs to change to support Social Work in Scotland? (Social Work Scotland, SASW and UNISON Scotland, July 2024)	What-needs-to-happen-now-survey.pdf	Quantitative analysis of survey questions asked of the social workers across Scotland.
Chief Social Work Officer survey report 2023-24 (Social Work Scotland, September 2024)	Chief Social Work Officer survey report 2023-24 - Social Work Scotland	The Social Work Scotland Chief Social Work Officer Annual Survey report
Chief Social Work Officers Annual Report Summary 2023/24 (Iriss, March 2025)	Chief Social Work Officers Annual Report Summary 2023/24 Iriss	This summary report provides an analysis and overview of the Chief Social Work Officer 2023-2024 Annual Reports. These

		annual reports are based around a reporting template and give a general overview of the social work landscape in Scotland.
Review of social work governance and assurance across Scotland (Care Inspectorate, May 2025)	Review of social work governance and assurance in Scotland	Final report following the Care Inspectorate's review of social work governance and assurance. The review took place between July and December 2024.
A secure future for Scottish social work (SASW, August 2025)	A secure future for Scottish social work BASW	SASW Manifesto for the 2026 Scottish elections.
Anti-racism Action Plan for the Scottish Social Work Sector: What we are going to do to make social work actively anti-racist (Scottish Government, August 2025)	Anti-racism Action Plan for the Scottish Social Work Sector What we are going to do to make social work actively anti-racist - gov.scot	The Action Plan sets out practical steps to embed anti-racism across Scotland's social work sector. It outlines strategic goals, measurable actions, and collaborative efforts to eliminate racism, support affected individuals, and build a fairer, more inclusive profession.
Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2024 Workforce Data (SSSC, September 2025)	WorkforceDataReport2024.pdf	An Official Statistics publication for Scotland. This report provides an overview of the data at a national level and sub-divided by sub-sector or local authority area.

Contact us

For more information about national developments to support social work, please contact NSWAcommunications@gov.scot