social work scotland
leading the profession

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Shaping the future of social work in Scotland

Introduction

Welcome to a short(ish) overview of Social Work Scotland's output and work during 2025. If you couldn't make it to our AGM in November, where we provide written updates and presentations, or even if you're not a member and you're interested in the work we're doing - this report is for you. If you have any questions and would like to talk to us about any of the work featured in this report, please contact us: admin@socialworkscotland.org.

Social Work Scotland is a membership organisation, providing supportive networks, representation and development for managers and leaders in social work, across the profession. We also have a distinct function to support the 32 Chief Social Work Officers in Scotland, and we work closely with other organisations who seek to support the profession across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally. These include the Scottish Government, the Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW), COSLA, Trade Unions, Higher Education Institutes, as well as institutions like Iriss, CELCIS, CYCJ and others.

Social work in Scotland continues to operate in an increasingly complex environment. In the run-up to a national election, there is growing divisions and challenges between local and national government approaches. These pressures are intensified by the 2025 autumn budget revealing a significant deficit for the Scottish Government. Social workers are facing growing moral distress as the demands of their roles increasingly conflict with their professional values. Building and maintaining a robust, confident social work workforce is a key priority in responding to identified challenges facing our communities. Social work, in common with other public services, also faces major difficulties in recruitment and retention, particularly of qualified and experienced social workers. What has remained consistent throughout all of this during the year is the unfailing input of our members, and their interest, passion, and commitment to the profession and its support and development.

Looking ahead, we expect big changes for Social Work Scotland as we lead a national conversation about social work with COSLA and Scottish Government as the Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP), and the impact that that will have on our members, local government, the third sector and all the associated professions we work with.

A new form of partnership; The Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP)

In our commitment to supporting and developing Social Work Scotland and the social work workforce, we have partnered with COSLA and OCSWA as the SSWP, with the aim to ensuring Scotland has a skilled, supported and sustainable social work workforce. The partnership is a tripartite approach, and feedback will shape the work of the SSWP to support the workforce and will also inform the planning of the National Social Work Agency.

For Social Work Scotland the developing Scottish Social Work Partnership offers an opportunity for a stronger national voice, increasing our profile and influence across Scottish Government on behalf of members and the wider social work workforce. It is intended to be vehicle to help social

work leaders to shape and inform the national agenda and secure meaningful improvement in social work services across the country. With colleagues from COSLA and the Scottish Government's new National Social Work Agency, our involvement in the Scottish Social Work Partnership promises a more coordinated national approach to the challenges our members face every day.

Find out more!

A year in numbers

5 Standing Committees held 24 meetings
26 Subgroups held 90 meetings
203 Individual members
35 Corporate sponsors
24 Consultation responses
16 Published reports and statements
2 National conferences
428 Conference attendees

Operations overview

Alongside the network of Standing Committees and subgroups, the projects we host and the work of our Policy and Practice team, we have an Operations team who manage the day-to-day business of Social Work Scotland. This year the operations team have been looking at our HR policies and support offers for staff and overseeing technological innovations to support all the work we do (including the option of AI). This has prompted a close look at our data security and regulatory compliance processes. Underpinning all this is continued work on our membership model and systems, and the finance work necessary to keep ourselves in the strongest position possible. There has also been a full range of engagement, communications and events, including work on the framing of "social work" in the media.

Membership

We welcomed 29 new members during 2025 – 10 Associate level, 11 Ordinary level and 8 Executive level – and were pleased to see over 100 recommitments to membership through renewals. New members from across the country have joined, with notable increases in areas such as the City of Glasgow and Shetland. November proved to be the busiest month for

applications - following the annual conference - with nearly four times the average monthly volume.

Individual membership accounts for less than 2% of Social Work Scotland's income, and we rely heavily on local authorities and other organisations for their corporate sponsorship to enable us to continue to provide the professional input and support to leaders and managers across Scotland.

With our joining of the Scottish Social Work Partnership in 2025, our ability to remain independent and support and amplify our membership's voices is increasingly important. In May of this year, our Board met in person and one of the many things they discussed was a review of our membership structure. We have been working on options in the background since then and are planning engagement with members for the Spring of 2026 to inform our next steps.

New Convenor and other Board appointments

Social Work Scotland's Annual General Meeting of members took place on 27 November. This important event is where members decide on changes to our Articles of Association, and our priorities for the year ahead. It is also when appointments to our Board of Directors are made. This year we were delighted to confirm Fiona Duncan as the new Convenor for Social Work Scotland. Fiona is currently the Highland Council's Chief Social Work Officer and Chief Officer (Health and Social Care). She was previously Chief Social Work Officer in Clackmannanshire and East Lothian and worked in Edinburgh's justice social work team.

We also welcomed to the Board Gary Hoey (Chief Social Work Officer, South Ayrshire) as our Vice-Convenor for 2026, and Steven Paterson, as a Non-Executive Director. Mike Brown was reappointed as our Treasurer, and George Palattiyil reappointed as a Non-Executive Director.

Members present at the Annual General Meeting took the opportunity to thank John Trainer for his two years as Convenor, and to Mike Burns (Past Convenor), Leigh Jolly (Vice-Convenor) and Lynsey Smith (Co-Chair, Justice Standing Committee) who stepped down from the Board this year.

Finance

Social Work Scotland's financial position remained sound in 2024-25. The year ended with a small deficit (-£5,558 or -0.6% of total income), which brings our Reserves down to £533,242 at 31 March 2025. About £200,000 of the Reserves would be needed to fund redundancy and other costs involved in winding up Social Work Scotland, should that ever be the decision of the membership.

Turnover (i.e. income) has exceeded £1 million for the past four years, reaching £1.7 million for 2023-24, and nearly £2 million (£1.9 million) in 2024-25. This reflects increased activity supported by a larger staff-group, as well as general cost inflation. Income and activity are best understood as divided between (a) the core functions of Social Work Scotland, and (b) the specific projects that we are commissioned to undertake, primarily by the Scottish Government.

Our main financial risk remains the dependence of Social Work Scotland on Scottish Government funding, which accounted for 91% of our total income (including all projects) and 80% of our core income. This is a risk in the context of the government's own difficult financial position, and how that might affect the availability of funding in future years.

More detail on our financial report is available from our Treasurer's report, which was issued for our Annual General Meeting.

Events

Social Work Scotland events

In early June, we hosted a **media roundtable** with journalists from trade and national media alongside social work leaders and professional association representatives in Scotland. This event explored the profession's engagement with the media, with the aim of building trust; it offered a unique opportunity to discuss barriers and opportunities for both parties, resulting in valuable insights for future collaboration and all-important relationship-building. We hope to build on this in 2026 with more events in partnership with the media. Roundtable summary here.

In June we also held an **Adults Social Work Conference** in Glasgow, profiling the interconnected nature of working with adults to 160 delegates from across Scotland through expert keynotes, academic presentations, a sector wide panel and range of crosscutting workshops. With the aim to overturn the perception that adults social work is a siloed area of practice, we highlighted the critical, interconnected nature across all professional fields and examined its opportunities and challenges. Highlights here.

Our flagship event, **Social Work Scotland Annual Conference and Exhibition** took place in October in Glasgow, bringing together almost 300 leaders, practitioners, and partners from across the country. We explored relationships as catalysts for change through leaders in academia, local authority, and lived experience, and engaged in interactive workshops covering topics such as relationships in the age of AI to relationships for restorative justice; reminding us of the profound impact of relationship-based practice and highlighting how empowering connections can drive positive change for us as leaders of the profession, as well as for the individuals, families, and communities we work with. Highlights here.

Save the Dates

Thursday 8 October 2026 – Annual Conference and Exhibition in Glasgow
Wednesday 3 June 2026 – Justice Conference in Glasgow

External Events

Staff and members have spoken at a wide range of events throughout the year. Highlights include:

Individuals from the Social Work Scotland core team and members attended the **ESN conference** in Arhaus in June, with our Justice Practice and Policy Lead and Digital Practice and Policy

Advisor holding a workshop on the Near Me in Prisons project – a secure online video calling system connecting social workers to inmates across the country saving crucial travel time and increasing communications and relationship building. Highlights here.

Our Adults Practice and Policy Lead spoke at **'Scotland's new Adults with Incapacity Bill and Mental Health Reforms: what is coming?'** in May, presenting on how to improve rights-based approaches in incapacity law.

Our Head of Policy and Workforce presented at '**Next steps for social care in Scotland and Care Reform Act implementation**' on the future of social work and leadership in Scotland.

Our Protecting Children Practice and Policy Advisor spoke at **NOTA Scotland conference** in September in a panel discussion focused on 'the Knock' in relation to online offending, focussing on the consequences for those within the family unit when it's an adult perpetrator within the home.

Our Children and Families Practice and Policy Lead took part in a panel discussion at Scottish Parliament for the **Festival of Politics** exploring how social work can help communities overcome the barriers of poverty, disability, and discrimination in relation to individual support decision making.

We were also represented at a variety of roundtables and research launch events, including 'Sign Loud': Sign LOUD (2025): Perspectives on domestic abuse and communication issues and the impact on deaf families, which was presented to the Deputy First Minister in December 2025.

Communications

Call to Action for the new Scottish Government

For the first time, we are creating Social Work Scotland's first ever political manifesto ahead of the upcoming Scottish election, as a **'**Call to Action' for the new government. We engaged with members earlier this year around key themes we want the new government to prioritise for social work such as prioritising investment, empowering communities, and addressing inequality. We want our manifesto to highlight the impact of government and local authority budgets and policy developments on the profession, and profile the complexity and scope of social work in society. It's a unique opportunity as we anticipate a significant public discussion around social care in the election.

We look forward to sharing a final version with you shortly and advocating for the 'Call to Action' with the media, partners, and politicians, towards tangible change to help shape the future of social work in Scotland.

Members bulletins

We will have sent 24 tailored bulletins to our members throughout 2025 which focus on highlighted organisational activity such as consultations, engagements, events, practice and policy focus areas, as well as other sector news, publications, job vacancies and more.

Framing work

We remain supportive of and work closely with Each and Every Child around framing how we speak about children with care experience. Members of the team took part in the Framing Champions workshop, senior members sit on the Advisory Group who meet regularly, and most recently colleagues took part in a creative development session around using Metaphors for Early Child Development and Trauma.

Media relations

We received 6 media enquiries throughout the year, responding to most or offering background and context where appropriate. We gave comments on a range of areas including the NCS Bill, on the new National Social Work Agency, Magic Notes pilots in Scotland, and most recently the appointment of the Chief National Social Work Adviser role being recruited to.

Media relations remain a priority for 2026 onwards, following on from our roundtable in June which was an excellent starting point to building effective and trusting relationships. We hope to continue working with media representatives to look at shaping positive stories around social work whilst linking to national issues, in support of a dedicated and proud workforce.

Consultations

A total of 24 **consultations** were completed by our core team, including 11 in adult social work, 5 in children and families, 4 in justice, and 4 relating to workforce and resource issues, as well as submissions for SWS and COSLA by our Treasurer, Mike Brown. Notably, this included consultation and call for views around the Scottish Parliament's Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill (CCE Bill). We also contributed oral evidence to Parliament on 3 occasions.

Whilst engaging with consultations is a vital and valuable part of our core work, the **level of consultation activity** and coordination was highlighted as a concern for an already overstretched workforce. We wrote to the Permanent Secretary and Directors General of Scottish Government, with SASW and on behalf of members, in October to highlight how unsustainable consultation engagement is becoming.

We published 9 **statements reflecting members' views and organisational positions** on various policy areas. Correspondence activity included the above letter around the level of consultation activity, a letter to the Minister highlighting the lack of engagement with children and families managers and CSWOs on the CCE Bill, and a letter to the Education, Children and Young People Committee concerning comments made in Parliament regarding the CCE Bill and Social Work Scotland.

We will continue **representing and advocating** for our members in 2026 and strengthening the national voice for social work leaders in Scotland through ongoing evidence opportunities in Parliament, other engagement with Ministers and Committees, consultations, and our role in the **Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP)**.

Policy and Practice overview

The Policy and Practice Leads and Advisors work in an ever-changing policy landscape, negotiating with local and national Government partners to balance the drive to deliver thoughtful and well-intentioned policy directives within the complex implementation landscape. Always with a mind to how policy can be delivered in a way that is meaningful and right, for people who access, and people who design and deliver social work support.

Across the policy and practice space, key issues of workforce capacity, partnership approaches, and policy implementation are critical. Whether in the context of delivering The Promise, the implementation of Self-Directed Support, digital transformation in Justice, or responding to Scottish Government's policy developments, Policy & Practice Leads and Advisors, and Project Teams purposefully profile the thoughts, view and feelings of the members of our committees and subgroups.

The British Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics are the guiding principles behind all of the work in the policy and practice space, we use these principles every day as our foundation for engaging with partners, and in keeping true to our purpose as set out in our Articles of Association.

Adults Standing Committee

Background

The Adults Standing Committee meets regularly to identify, discuss, and address the key challenges facing adult social work across Scotland. Its work is structured and coordinated through seven dedicated subgroups, each focused on a critical area of practice. These include Mental Health Officers, who provide specialist guidance and oversight on mental health legislation and practice; the Independent Living Fund practice network, which supports work to enable greater independence and choice for people with complex support needs; and the Learning Disability and Autism subgroup, which focuses on improving services, outcomes, and rights-based practice for these communities.

Further, the Older People subgroup addresses the evolving needs of Scotland's ageing population and supports the delivery of high-quality home care. The Adult Support and Protection subgroup provides leadership and guidance on safeguarding adults at risk of harm, while the Self-Directed

Support subgroup drives person-centred approaches and ensures that SDS policy and practice are embedded effectively across services. Most recently, the committee has established a Substance Use subgroup to respond to the growing national focus on recovery-oriented support and interventions. Together, these subgroups enable the Adults Standing Committee to take a comprehensive, coordinated approach to adult social work, ensuring that policy, practice, and service delivery are informed by the latest evidence, professional expertise, and lived experience. Highlighted activity includes:

Mental Health Officers
The subgroup remains deeply engaged in Adults with Incapacity (AWI) reform. Following last year's consultation response, subgroup members now participate in both a Ministerial Oversight Group and an Expert Working Group. Their work also includes tackling delayed discharge issues The subgroup's previous Chair gave evidence to Scottish Parliament on the Right to Addiction Recovery Bill, advocating for a broader approach beyond abstinence. The group is now preparing for the post-2026 landscape when the National Mission concludes and is exploring future service models and supporting MHO training and development.

Learning Disability and Autism
The subgroup experienced the loss of long-standing chair Duncan McIntyre this summer. Stephanie MacGregor-Cross has since taken on the role, leading the group through key issues such as the Coming Home strategy, financial and resourcing challenges, and the potential LDAN Bill.

Substance Use
The subgroup's former Chair recently provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament on the Right to Addiction Recovery Bill, advocating for a recovery approach that extends beyond abstinence to include wider health, wellbeing, and social support outcomes. Looking ahead, the subgroup is actively preparing for the post-2026 landscape following the conclusion of the National Mission on Alcohol and Drugs. This work includes exploring innovative and sustainable service models, identifying emerging priorities, and ensuring that future approaches to substance use support remain person-centred, evidence-informed, and responsive to the needs of individuals and communities across Scotland.

Older Adults
The subgroup actively responded to consultations including the Commissioner for Older People Bill and the Long-Term Conditions Framework. The group has expanded its remit to include unpaid carers and continues to explore resourcing, future care provision, and financial sustainability.

Adult Support and Protection
The subgroup has focused on improving collaboration with financial institutions, including engagement with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and contributed to the position statement on GP and Advanced Medical Practitioner (AMP) charging for statutory input.

Independent Living Fund (ILF)
The ILF reopened in April 2024, with nearly 1,000 applications received by September. Annual allocation reviews will guide funding, and a two-year review cycle is being introduced for new

recipients. Via our Practice Network we continue to work closely with our colleagues at ILF Scotland to understand and promote the use of the ILF.

Self-Directed Support (SDS) Practice Network
The subgroup continues to meet regularly to explore how the **SDS Project** influences service delivery, especially amid financial pressures on local authorities.

SDS Project

Social Work Scotland's hosted SDS Project team continues to develop the seven thematic workstreams and has also launched three significant resources. This year, as well as hosting quarterly half day Community of Practice events and regular topic-based seminars, the SDS Project have worked in partnership with three local areas to deliver a roadshow in each area focusing on using the SDS standards and guidance and kickstarting local development.

Now in its seventh year, the SDS Project builds on existing resources to support best practice, including the recent publication of Standard 13 on Direct Payments for employing Personal Assistants, with accompanying guidance and an easy-read version.

The SDS Project is now focusing on supporting local implementation through an expanded Community of Practice offer - quarterly events, seminars, peer spaces, local roadshows, and tailored support. A relationship-based practice model is also in development, alongside a learning and development strand. For updates, contact sds.team@socialworkscotland.org to receive bi-monthly bulletins.

Looking Ahead

- Support leaders and managers in navigating financial pressures across all 32 local authorities.
- Assert the social work role in the Care Reform Bill.
- Continue informing CRAG and delayed discharge efforts.
- Advance AWI reform with a human rights focus.
- Strengthen collaboration in medical and financial contexts, especially in statutory ASP and mental health work.
- Prepare for the post-2026 substance use service landscape.
- Support the SDS Project, emphasising relationship-based social work.
- Review subgroup workplans to ensure strategic alignment with ASC priorities.

Children and Families Standing Committee

Background

The Children and Families Standing Committee now meets every six weeks, alternating between online meetings and extended in-person sessions to effectively manage its increasingly complex

and growing agenda. The committee is supported by a dedicated team that includes a Policy and Practice Lead, a Protecting Children Adviser, and a newly appointed Secure Care Adviser. In addition, the committee works closely with key national projects, including the Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD) and Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) programmes, which play a central role in promoting consistent, high-quality practice in child protection investigations across Scotland.

The Standing Committee also oversees and supports the work of eight specialised subgroups, each focusing on a critical area of children and families social work. These include Child Protection, which provides guidance and leadership on safeguarding policy and practice; Early Help and Family Support, which promotes proactive and preventative approaches to family wellbeing; Residential Child Care, which focuses on standards, quality assurance, and development in residential settings; and Historic Abuse, which addresses the ongoing needs of survivors and service improvements. Other subgroups include Reviewing Officers, Community Placement, Disability, and Out of Hours, all of which work to ensure that policy, practice, and service delivery are informed by professional expertise, evidence, and the experiences of children, young people, and families. Together, the committee and its subgroups provide a coordinated framework to support safe, effective, and rights-based social work practice for children and families across Scotland.

Highlighted activity includes:

- Youth justice (Children (Care and Justice) Act 2024 implementation, Reimagining Secure Care, secure capacity, places of safety/custody/children in court/rights and justice).
- Protecting children work (Age of criminal responsibility (ACR) review report, mandatory reporting, Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE), IRD, Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) for Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) evaluation report, Domestic Homicide and Suicide Review (DHSR)
- Children's mental health.
- Focused policy, legislative and improvement work across the sector (kinship care, vision fostering, housing, ASL, trauma training, aftercare, care leaver payment, fostering issues, cost of care/profit, WFWF, DHSR, transitions).
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children work e.g. age assessments, placement capacity, links to trafficking and exploitation.
- Impact of our changing care population and international context (workforce skills, international knowledge and interface).
- A higher political profile for SWS in children and families.
- Responding to many consultations and calls for evidence, including the 'Promise' Bill areas.

Protecting Children Activity

- Mandatory reporting and developing an evidence-based position paper to inform future conversations.
- Work with COSLA on implementation options for a sustainable Scottish Safe and Together model.
- Delivery of ACR training for joint investigative interviewers.
- Work with partners on improvements to support for indirect victims of harm.

- As part of the national CSAE group, considered learning and development needs of the sector.
- CP subgroup work included data, revision of the national risk assessment. framework, Equal Protection review, child criminal exploitation (CCE), trafficking, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Bairns' Hoose.
- Work to position the national contextual safeguarding group as a CPC Scotland subgroup. The local authority interest group is supported to identify local and national priorities for implementation.
- Bairns' Hoose development locally and nationally.
- Due to commence Spring 2026, we now support implementation of DHSR's.

Secure Care

Funded by Scottish Government, a new Secure Care Advisor post began in August 2025 in response to a period of intense work following challenges resulting from ending use of Youth Offender Institutions (YOI) for under 18's. Priorities include:

- Secure transport standards.
- National secure care regulations and standards.
- Alongside COSLA and government, development of a joint Action Plan for implementation of Reimagining Secure Care. This includes data, a national co-ordination function, future shape of secure care, workforce skills and needs.
- Inputting to a range of processes related to implementation of Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act.

National IRD Learning and Development Project

Funded by Scottish Government, SWS, Police Scotland and NES are establishing this collaborative project delivering a learning and development programme for IRDs.
Priorities include:

- Delivery of the national programme, with associated evaluation.
- Engage with core agencies, local CPCs and national education colleagues in relation to IRD training needs.
- Work with local partners develop an effective plan to deliver learning.
- Support local improvement journey and quality assurance for IRD.
- Support links to other national developments e.g. JII/Bairns Hoose/ACR.

National JII Project

The team continues to provide training and implementation support and continuous improvement in Joint Investigative Interviewing. Highlights include:

- Between August 2024 and July 2025, of 3,674 JII's, 84% were undertaken using the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM).
- All areas in Scotland are now live in practice with cohorts trained in the SCIM.
- The recruitment of 2 new Project Officers.
- Additional funding to extend Speech and language support.

- Revised National Guidance for Joint Investigative Interviewing nearing completion.
- An increasing data and evidence base for the approach which informs development e.g. disability research (baseline project data showed 6.6% of children interviewed having disability; CELCIS research testing new indicators now places this at 42.6%).

Other Activity

- SWS returned to Moldova for further consultancy work linked to their programme to move children to family-based care.
- We continue to work alongside CFAB around international kinship and to contribute to international conferences.
- Ongoing contribution to a wide range of evidence sessions at Parliament, cross party groups and inquiries, and the Festival of Politics.
- Publication of a child friendly version of our Reviewing Officers handbook.
- The immense work of our subgroups straddling the range of children and families work across policy and practice areas, all of which have their own extensive agenda.

Looking Ahead

- Focus on legislation, policy, and implementation – especially the 'Promise' Bill agenda
- Prioritise implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) Act, Bairns Hoose, CSAE/CCE and improvements in residential and secure care.
- Develop and further explore the benefits of overarching approaches such as contextual safeguarding.
- Facilitate and contribute to issues related to the children and families workforce, National Social Work Agency and other wider social work areas.

Justice Standing Committee

Background

The Justice Standing Committee (JSC) meets every eight weeks and is consistently well attended by Justice Social Work (JSW) managers, senior practitioners, and partner organisations, reflecting the committee's central role in shaping justice social work policy and practice across Scotland. The committee's work focuses on justice issues of strategic significance, ensuring alignment with the Scottish Government's Justice Vision, the Community Justice Strategy, and its associated Delivery Plan. By providing a forum for discussion, guidance, and decision-making, the JSC ensures that national priorities are effectively translated into practice at a local level, promoting high standards of service delivery and professional accountability.

The committee is supported by five specialised subgroups, each of which reports into the JSC on strategic and operational matters while addressing the practical realities of effective service delivery. These subgroups include Prevention, which focuses on reducing offending and supporting early interventions; Community Sentencing, which oversees developments in alternatives to custody and rehabilitation programmes; Through-Care, which concentrates on continuity of support for individuals transitioning between custodial and community settings; Public

Protection, which provides leadership on safeguarding vulnerable people; and Performance/Quality Assurance, which monitors service standards, outcomes, and continuous improvement. The professionalism, expertise, and influence of the JSC are widely recognised across the sector, resulting in significant demands on members to contribute to a variety of national initiatives, including active participation in the Criminal Justice Board and other cross-agency strategic forums. Through this work, the JSC plays a pivotal role in promoting evidence-based practice, innovation, and the ongoing development of justice social work in Scotland.

Highlighted activity includes:

Prison Population
This has required a whole-systems, collaborative approach, to understand the reasons behind overcrowding in prison and the changing nature of the prison population. SWS has been a key player in discussions around Emergency Early Release and three Programme Boards related to the prison population and effective practice as part of community sentencing

Public Protection
SWS has taken the lead in supporting CSWOs and SOLACE in relation to the implementation of MAPPS (multi- agency public protection system) in Scotland by 2028- a UK wide Public Protection System. There have been developments also in relation to the roll out of the internet offending programme, sexual offending programme and some challenging issues in relation to the Home Office “Foreign National Offender” dispersal approach.

Funding issues
A joint submission by SWS and COSLA was made to the Criminal Justice Committee as part of the pre-budget scrutiny process. A new funding formula was agreed after consultation with SWS and approved by COSLA leaders. The distribution of Section 27 funding during 26/27 will mean that some Local Authorities will gain and some will lose from their allocation. This is well demonstrated from the recent indicative allocation of the Caledonian funding, making delivery to accredited standards difficult or impossible for some.

Inspection
Publication of Prison-Based Social Work (PBSW) Thematic Review on 4/4/24 and HMIPS Progression report published on 14/6/24, with a number of recommendations being considered and an improvement plan being discussed by the through-care sub-group. There is regular engagement with Care Inspectorate who have attended the JSC to discuss the revised self-evaluation process.

JSW developments: recommendations are being made to the Cabinet Secretary about proposed changes which will make improvements for services and staff, ready to work with increased numbers in the community rather than in custody. Significant changes to the way in which PBSW services are delivered is also under discussion

Other Activity

- Covid 19 inquiry with a focus on the impact on JSW and learning from the processes which were put in place during the pandemic

- Near Me digital platform is being used in prison settings to enhance engagement with social workers and other professionals and making substantial saving on travel time and cost
- Commission on penal reform and sentencing- SWS has contributed to discussion which will help shape future redesign. The Commission is scheduled to report by December 2025

Looking Ahead

- Progress implementation plans for MAPPS over 26/27, with partners
- Contribute to prison population discussion while planning for the implications of increased numbers of people on community orders
- Assess changes to the Justice landscape and implications for SWS, including resourcing, once the Commission on penal reform and sentencing is published
- Focus on quality assurance and continuous improvement in delivery of JSW services
- Plan and prepare for redesign of PBSW

Workforce and Resources Standing Committee

Background

The Workforce and Resource Standing Committee (WRSC) plays a pivotal role in ensuring that Scotland's social work profession is equipped with the financial, human, and technological resources necessary to deliver high-quality, sustainable services. Over the past year, the WRSC has strengthened its position as a key strategic forum for addressing workforce challenges, shaping policy, and influencing national priorities. By providing leadership, oversight, and coordination, the committee ensures that social work practice is supported by robust planning, sound financial management, and effective professional development opportunities, all of which are critical in maintaining a resilient and skilled workforce across Scotland.

During this reporting period, the WRSC has focused on three core areas: workforce planning, financial sustainability, and professional development. Committee membership has been refreshed to ensure strong representation from Chief Social Work Officers (CSWOs), local authorities, and other key partners, enabling a broad and inclusive perspective on sector-wide challenges. The committee's work is further supported by its four specialised subgroups - Finance, Learning & Development, Digital, and Contracts & Commissioning - each driving targeted workstreams to address complex issues and implement practical solutions. Highlights from the past year include initiatives to strengthen workforce planning through improved data collection and forecasting, developing new frameworks for continuing professional development, promoting digital innovation to support efficient service delivery, and providing guidance on contracts and commissioning to enhance service quality and sustainability. Through these efforts, the WRSC continues to play a central role in ensuring that Scotland's social work workforce is capable, well-supported, and prepared to meet the evolving needs of the communities it serves.

Workforce Planning

WRSC has positioned itself as the hub for national workforce planning discussions, working

closely with Scottish Government and COSLA, we have contributed to shaping the National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care, advocating for recognition of social work's distinct needs and the critical role of registered managers. As part of the Scottish Social Work Partnership, we plan to undertake mapping exercise is underway to identify gaps and duplication in workforce planning activity, laying the foundation for a national social work workforce plan.

Finance and Funding
The Finance Subgroup, launched in early 2025, provides a confidential space for finance managers to share intelligence on budget pressures and legislative costings. WRSC submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament on Stage 2 amendments to the National Care Service Bill, challenging the lack of clarity around investment pledges and calling for sustainable funding models. We continue to influence Scottish Government and COSLA on fair distribution of resources and monitor the impact of financial constraints on service delivery.

Education and Learning
Collaboration with SWEP (now closed, with work having transferred tot the Scottish Social Work Partnership) and the Learning & Development Subgroup has been central to advancing professional development. WRSC supported the Graduate Apprenticeship pilot, reviewed the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) supported year, and hosted workshops to address barriers in practice learning. These initiatives aim to strengthen pre- and post-qualifying routes and ensure a skilled, resilient workforce.

Digital and Data
Recognising the growing importance of technology, WRSC initiated plans for a Digital Subgroup to explore solutions that enhance workforce planning and practice improvement. This work aligns with national data strategies and supports innovation in service delivery.

Looking Ahead

- Work with partners to embed the Graduate Apprenticeship model nationally and expand advanced practice frameworks.
- As part of the Scottish Social work Partnership, progress work to deliver a comprehensive national workforce plan.
- Continue advocacy for fair funding and develop tools for financial impact assessment.
- Strengthen WRSC's role within the Scottish Social Work Partnership, enhancing collaboration and leadership capacity.

Digital

The Digital Policy and Practice Adviser role, established in 2022, supports priorities within the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint Digital Health and Care Strategy, with a focus on integrating digital technology across social work and social care. Highlighted activity includes:

Near Me in Prisons
Social Work Scotland continues to lead the rollout of secure video calling to support social work in prisons. The initiative improves throughcare and prerelease planning while reducing travel and strengthening collaboration. After launching at HMP Stirling in July 2024, the service expanded to

HMP Glenochil in May 2025, with HMP Polmont planned by end of 2025, subject to IT readiness. So far, 84 calls have been completed, with over 300 registered users and 35 active virtual waiting areas across social work, housing, psychological services, and third-sector partners. Reported benefits include better communication, faster response times, and stronger professional relationships. At HMP Stirling, 12 calls saved over 500 travel miles and eight hours of one-way time. The Scottish Prison Service has extended access to outsourced psychological services and is exploring a wider rollout. Work has started with East Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership to explore expansion to HMP Kilmarnock in 2026.

Magic Notes
This AI tool transcribes and summarises practitioner–client conversations. As of late 2025, nine local authorities are using it, with others assessing its value. Evaluations show up to 1.5 days saved per week, a 75% reduction in admin time per assessment, and 90% faster report submission. Social Work Scotland helped secure a Scotland-specific pricing model and has adopted the tool internally to reduce admin demands.

Digital Social Work Subgroup
Established in February 2025, the subgroup meets bimonthly, with nearly 80 members collaborating on digital integration, including national programmes such as the Digital Front Door, digital telecare, and software regulation.

Promoting Digital
Social Work Scotland continues to highlight Scotland's leadership in digital social work, including presenting Near Me in Prisons at the European Social Services Conference in Denmark.

Looking Ahead

- Complete Near Me rollout to HMP Polmont and progress expansion to HMP Kilmarnock and other prisons
- Embed digital innovation within the National Social Work Agency
- Contribute to national digital data, skills, and leadership programmes

Education and Learning

Social Work Scotland hosted the Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) Programme Office from its creation in 2020. In early 2025, it was agreed that SWEP would be wound down, with its functions integrated into the Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP) under the Education and Learning priority. Programme Office staff transitioned into the Social Work Scotland core team during 2025, ensuring expertise was retained and embedding social work education within core activity. Highlighted activity includes:

SSWP – Education & Learning Priority
This priority builds on work previously delivered through SWEP, strengthening alignment between pre- and post-qualifying learning to support workforce sustainability. An Education and Learning Delivery Group and a smaller Coordination Team have been established. The Coordination Team leads on progressing activity, while the Delivery Group - leaders from practice, higher education, and regulation - provides expert oversight.

Local Learning Partnerships (LLPs)
LLPs build on sector engagement completed in 2024, which identified the need for stronger local infrastructure to support social work education. LLPs will connect universities, employers, students, and people with lived experience, improving placement capacity, aligning education with workforce needs, and supporting continuous professional learning. They are governed through the SSWP Delivery Group and delivered jointly by Scottish Government, SSSC, Social Work Scotland, and Iriss. Information sessions are planned for late 2025, ahead of national rollout in early 2026.

NQSW Supported Year
The national Newly Qualified Social Worker Supported Year launched in October 2024. Since implementation, employers and practitioners have raised concerns about workload pressures, variation in delivery, and limited funding. Social Work Scotland is working with SSSC to address these challenges and ensure expectations are realistic. Evaluation is underway, including an independent Iriss review, analysis of local authority submissions, and a joint evaluation event in November 2025. Findings will inform improvements to ensure the model is sustainable and impactful.

SSSC Standards for Learning
Social Work Scotland submitted a detailed response to the SSSC consultation on standards for pre- and post-qualifying learning, stressing the need for alignment with social work values and the realities of practice.

Looking Ahead
Work is underway to establish a new Education and Research Standing Committee to strengthen connections between education, research, and practice. It will provide a national forum linking universities, employers, and frontline professionals, ensuring academic expertise informs policy and workforce development.

Contact Us

Email: admin@socialworkscotland.org
Website: www.socialworkscotland.org
LinkedIn: @Social Work Scotland
Bluesky: @socworkscot.bsky