# Taking a Trauma-informed Lens to a Place-based Approach

**Briefing**

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# About this briefing note

Scotland's vision for the future is centred on improving outcomes for people who are more likely to experience poorer outcomes because of experiences of inequalities, trauma, and adversity. The Scottish Government and COSLA have made clear commitments to embedding and promoting equalities and human rights.

There are a number of approaches that have been developed to support shifts across practice, policy, and decision making that ultimately seek to improve equalities, uphold the human rights of children, young people and adults, and improve outcomes for Scotland's communities. Two of these are a trauma-informed approach and a place-based approach.

These approaches are deeply interlinked and should be considered together as part of a broader ambition to improve the outcomes of individuals and communities across Scotland, and to tackle inequalities, adversity and trauma in all their forms. These two approaches cannot be implemented or realised without the other.

This briefing aims to:

▶ Highlight what we mean by psychological trauma, the impact and prevalence of trauma across Scotland, and how trauma-informed services, systems and workforces can support improved outcomes for people and communities;

▶ Provide insight into a place-based approach, the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and how they can strengthen health and wellbeing within communities; and

▶ Explore how a trauma-informed approach and a place-based approach can support one another across policy, practice and decision making, to improve local authorities and key community planning partners' shared ambition of improving outcomes for people and communities.

# What is "psychological trauma"?

As a society, we are becoming increasingly aware that living through traumatic events is more common than previously realised. This can include an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing. There can also be a cumulative impact of trauma— the more trauma we experience, the more likely we are to experience adverse outcomes.

Many of us will have lived and living experience of trauma, and trauma can affect all of us at any stage of our lives - there is no "them" and "us". The prevalence of traumatic experiences means that trauma will inevitably impact many within our workforce, whether through personal experiences or through the work we do. It is vital that all workers feel safe and supported in our workplaces. This is particularly important when we are caring for and supporting others because those of us directly supporting people affected by trauma face an increased risk of experiencing vicarious trauma, moral injury and compassion fatigue.

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We are all affected by traumatic events in different ways. Many of us will have existing support in place through family, friends, and our community to support our resilience. Some people report experiencing positive post-traumatic growth. Although many of us have the right supports in place to recover from these experiences without adverse outcomes, we know that the experience of interpersonal trauma can disrupt our ability to form and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with others. This can be particularly true in childhood if we do not have supportive adults in our life. Those of us who experience trauma are at higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes at all stages of our lives, ranging from physical and mental health, education, justice and employment.

# What is a trauma-informed approach?

There is growing evidence that trauma-informed and responsive services, systems and workforces, where the impact of trauma is understood by staff, and systems and ways of working are adapted accordingly, can reduce barriers for people to access support. This can be through personal relationships, our wider communities, or help from specialist and/or universal services. This can ultimately help those of us affected by trauma to build our resilience, recover and experience improved outcomes. If we don't respond in ways that adapt to the impact of trauma and reduce the barriers it can create, we risk a society in which those of us who have experienced the most harm and have the greatest need, have the least opportunity to access the specialist and universal services we need.

We all have a role to play in recognising and preventing the barriers that the impact of trauma can create in accessing the relationships and services we need to recover to live the life we wish to. This doesn't mean that everyone needs to be a trauma expert —we know that different knowledge and skills are required to support people's recovery. But it does mean that all workers, in the context of our own role and work remit, have a unique and essential part to play in recognising when someone may be affected by trauma. This is through collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that prevents barriers to opportunity, supports recovery, does no harm and recognises and supports people's resilience. This way of working to ensure that every aspect of a person's experience – from relationships to experiences of physical environments – should be underpinned by the five key principles: safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

> Trauma is everybody's business. We all have a role to play in recognising and preventing the barriers that the impact of trauma can create in accessing the relationships and services we need to recover to live the life we wish to.

# Why assess place and wellbeing?

The places where we live, work, and play have an important influence on our health and wellbeing throughout our lifetime. Some aspects of place will nurture and promote good health while others can have detrimental effects. Places are proven to have a positive and/or negative impact on our wellbeing, and, in many cases, a negative impact is the result of the unintended consequences of well-meant decisions. Wellbeing is not only the absence of ill-health but is the state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Many factors affect wellbeing, including the physical and social conditions in which people live, move around, access housing, employment, services, and open spaces while feeling safe and included.

The distribution of these characteristics is not equal. Those living in areas of greater deprivation are more likely to be exposed to harmful environmental factors, such as poor air quality, and less likely to have access to beneficial ones, such as green space. Inequalities in the physical environment can create serious disadvantages for people living in relatively deprived areas, reinforcing health inequalities. This has been exacerbated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Local councils and their partners have a key opportunity, when making decisions, to consider the impact their choices have on their places and the opportunity to consider improving places as part of delivering on their overall ambitions.

> Inequalities in the physical environment can create serious disadvantages for people living in relatively deprived areas, reinforcing health inequalities.

# What is a place-based approach?

Across Scotland, many communities are facing similar challenges such as ill health, deprivation, disinvestment, or poor environmental quality. The extent to which these challenges are experienced by those who live in an area vary depending on the local context and individual circumstances. Every place is a different blend of physical, social, and economic characteristics that interact and influence each other. A place-based approach is a people-centric approach that seeks to understand local places through identifying those unique blends of characteristics that exist within them. By using a place-based approach to think about how an intervention to improve one of these characteristics can have an unintended positive or negative consequence on another, it ensures that different interconnections and lived experiences are acknowledged. Taking this into account in a joint working, collaborative approach focuses all the action, effort, and investment in a place to maximise the opportunity for positive consequences and minimise negative ones. Therefore, leading to better-informed decisions, which in turn, leads to the delivery of more effective services and more resilient communities. Place-based working aims to:

> A place-based approach is a people-centric approach that seeks to understand local places through identifying those unique blends of characteristics that exist within them.

▶ address complex problems that no one service working alone can solve;

▶ implement preventative measures; and

▶ break down organisational silos and bring sectors together around a shared ambition when designing and delivering services.

While approaches cannot be universally applied and what works in one area might not always be transferrable to others, there are consistent factors that impact our lives that can nurture and support good health, while not achieving them can be detrimental. Place-based approaches seek to understand the place itself in order to plan policy responses that are best suited to the challenges in that area.

# How can a place-based approach and a trauma-informed approach support local authorities and community planning partners in improving outcomes?

Trauma and place are deeply intertwined. For example, historical trauma inadvertently brought about by previous placemaking decisions, practices, and processes and how they have affected communities. The impacts of psychological trauma can be exacerbated and compounded by the unique structural inequalities and social isolation faced within and across communities.

Trauma can mean that people live in a state of threat, an adaptive reaction where being vigilant protects themselves from experiencing further harm. Without these adaptations to our physical environment, people may experience a lack of safety and feel out of control or disempowered, which feeds into this elevated sense of threat and reinforces those invisible barriers to services and opportunities. However, environments which enable people to feel a sense of safety, have choices in how they interact in a space, feel empowered in the place they live and/or work, and that fosters a sense of trust and collaboration among community members, can help to remove those invisible barriers to services and life opportunities that trauma can create.

> Taking a trauma-informed lens to a place-based approach can ensure that the environment around those of us who have experienced trauma responds to our needs and provides us with the support we need for recovery.

Taking a trauma-informed lens to a place-based approach can ensure that the environment around those of us who have experienced trauma responds to our needs and provides us with the support we need for recovery. This can create a community that provides a foundation for support and connection, allowing for meaningful relationships to be formed that can assist people affected by trauma in our recovery journey. Having stable, supportive relationships can have a positive impact on people's wellbeing, and evidence shows that these types of relationships are the best predictors of recovery following traumatic experiences. Other supportive mechanisms for those of us affected by trauma include housing stability and financial security.

# What is a place-based approach?

There are lots of examples across Scotland of how we can consider Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and the key principles of a trauma-informed approach together.
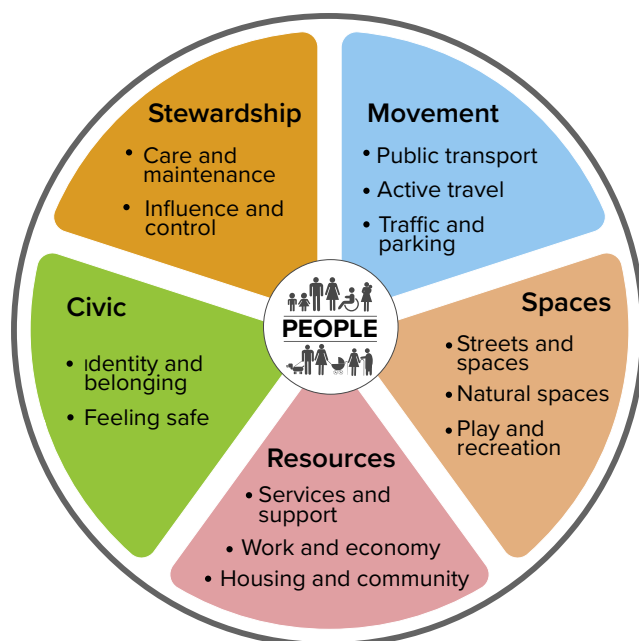


## Movement

Ensuring that services and support are available and easy to access in local communities, and that there is easy connectivity across and between communities, can provide practical support for people's recovery. One aspect of a successful public transport system is accessibility. Public transport is often the only means of transport available to many people to carry out essential daily tasks including access to healthcare, employment, education, childcare, and recreational opportunities. As such, by allowing people access to their local community, public transport plays a vital role in minimising loneliness and social seclusion, whilst also safeguarding independence.

The Community Transport Association is a UK-based charity that supports, and advocates for, the delivery of innovative and flexible transport solutions in a bid to achieve social change and the removal of transport barriers facing communities. In 2024, the charity launched their 'Healthy Communities Programme' in Scotland with the aim of improving patient access to health and social care and establishing healthy communities through delivering non-emergency patient transport, mentoring those currently providing Community Transport, and facilitating new working partnerships.

# Spaces

❝ Buildings speak to us – they affect how we think, feel and behave. Yet, we often miss how significant they are to us, and to the public being served...How we offer care [and services] must also closely consider what the buildings are communicating to [those of us accessing services] about their safety and worth, and also how they impact upon staff. ❞

Briefing – Buildings Speak to Us: The Need for Trauma Informed Environments

The built environments in which our local services are delivered may often feel sterile, unwelcoming and functional, and in some cases re-traumatising. But, by listening to those of us accessing services, service and estates staff, making small tweaks to our physical buildings can help these environments feel welcoming, humanising and can help people feel psychologically and physically safe.

Investing in green space initiatives such as community gardens increases favourable mental health effects such as reducing stress levels, whilst also promoting social cohesion and a sense of community. Such initiatives allow community members to directly shape their place which fosters a sense of ownership over their local area. Encouraging and involving residents in the decision-making process and being transparent about the use of, and changes to, their built environment supports empowerment and helps to promote trust between the local authority and the wider community.

# Resources

Everyone in the community should have access to health-enhancing, accessible, affordable and well-maintained services, facilities and amenities. These should be responsive to the needs and priorities of communities. As such, people within the community should have a voice in the decision-making process around what services, facilities and amenities are available.

Creating a healthy workplace culture is an ethical imperative and requires planning and consistency, as this will not only impact on our staff, but also their families and the people they support. The Rest, Refresh, Refuel project aims to address the fundamental needs of community-based workers in Midlothian. Community-based support requires staff to travel between client/patient homes, and workers indicated that they need access to spaces to meet their basic physical and wellbeing needs whilst away from theirbase. To address this, the virtual Rest, Refresh and Refuel resource map was created to allow staff

to identify locally accessible facilities to meet their needs. The map includes facilities for food and drink, available toilets, areas where sanitary products are available, and other general rest areas.

## Civic

Everyone can benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history, where people feel like they belong and are able to participate and interact positively with others. This concept of place and community are key to supporting people's resilience and recovery from traumatic experiences. Many of us who have experienced trauma will not need to access specialist services. Evidence shows that positive relationships with family, peers and communities can support our resilience and help us to recover from our experiences of trauma. Ensuring that services and support are available and easy to access in local communities, and that there is easy connectivity across and between communities, can provide practical support for people's recovery. If we can access support and develop relationships in our local community, we are more likely to build resilience and experience improved outcomes.

> Evidence shows that positive relationships with family, peers and communities can support our resilience and help us to recover from our experiences of trauma.

An example of this is the [Trauma-Informed Community Builder](#), a role developed by Resilience Learning Partnership, a social enterprise, and Sanctuary, a not-for-profit housing association. This position combines an asset-based community development approach with trauma-informed practice to build relationships with people within the community to improve engagement with all groups. People within the supported communities appear more connected with each other because of the Community Builder actively linking different groups throughout the community. This was an important aspect of the work as the aim was to build connection and relationships, particularly as the community is still dealing with collective trauma because of the pandemic. Furthermore, the role discovered the capacity, strengths and gifts of people across the community, allowing for these assets to be drawn upon to further independently develop the community.

## Stewardship

Everyone is empowered to be involved in a place where local outcomes are improved by effective collaborations between communities, community organisations and public bodies, and decision-making processes are designed to involve communities as equal partners. By empowering local communities to have increased influence over decisions and collaborate on solutions, this allows

those of us with lived experience of trauma to ensure that decisions, policies and services are meeting our needs.

A number of local areas have shared work they have undertaken to make changes to the physical environment of services in response to feedback from those of us accessing and engaging with their services. For example, a local Homelessness and Rapid Rehousing team have made changes to their interview rooms based on feedback from people they are supporting, whilst a local Justice Social Work Service made significant changes to their buildings and surrounding areas through engagement with people with lived experience of trauma.

# How could this work in practice?

A [Place and Wellbeing Assessment](#) provides a means to take a place-based approach and activate the Place Principle within a plan, strategy, or proposal. The Assessment process pulls together expertise and perspectives from policy makers and other groups of decisions makers to consider a plan, policy, or decision's impact on delivering a place that enables wellbeing. To do this, those in attendance consider a plan, policy, or decision's impact on the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#), a comprehensive list of evidenced features that, if we get them right, enable the community living, working, and relaxing there to strengthen their health and wellbeing. During this Assessment process, it is beneficial to consider what existing good practice is already taking place within a community on which to build.

Embedding the Outcomes as part of decision-making processes within policy and implementation ensures a joined-up approach to place. Using the Outcomes enables coordinated action and investment to create successful places that improve the lives of people while protecting the planet and supporting inclusive economies.

## Key questions

The questions below may be useful to consider when applying a trauma-informed lens to a Place and Wellbeing Assessment.

### Understanding the nature, prevalence and impact of psychological trauma

Has the Place and Wellbeing Assessment taken account of and considered:

▶ The prevalence and impact of trauma in the local community/population it is looking to serve, as well as in the workforce involved in its delivery?

▶ The varied needs that those of us who have experienced trauma may have?

▶ How systems, policies and processes may cause re-traumatisation, and the barriers those of us affected by trauma can face when trying to access universal and specialist services?

▶ How the above might impact on equity of access to support and positive outcomes for those affected by trauma in the local community?

### Promoting the key principles of a trauma-informed approach

Has the Place and Wellbeing Assessment taken account of and considered how to:

- ▶ Communicate a shared vision and ongoing commitment to the ambition of trauma-informed and responsive services, systems and workforces?

- ▶ Value the contributions of lived experience of trauma? How has the approach been robustly and meaningfully informed by the experiences of people who will be affected by what is proposed, including those of us who might experience multiple barriers to accessing support and/or those of us who have experienced trauma?

- ▶ Value the development of workforce skills and knowledge and commit to an ongoing context and culture that actively supports the workforce to put into practice the knowledge and skills they have learnt in training around psychological trauma?

- ▶ Highlight a commitment to staff wellbeing? How has the approach been developed in collaboration with the workforces involved in its delivery?

- ▶ Build ongoing feedback loops from people who will be impacted by what is proposed and those of us affected by psychological trauma?

- ▶ Develop new/ support existing services, systems and workforces to offer a greater sense of choice, trust, empowerment, collaboration and safety with everyone they come into contact with?

## Supporting local priorities

Has the Place and Wellbeing Assessment taken account of and considered how to:

- ▶ Recognise that embedding a trauma-informed approach supports any proposed outcomes and/or existing local priorities?

- ▶ Champion and support the building of both individual and community resilience?

- ▶ Develop opportunities to build relationships between services/organisations and the local community and recognise the importance of multi-agency, collaborative working?

It might also be helpful to:

- ▶ Use the Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces in Scotland, alongside the Assessment. This resource is designed to help services and organisations identify and reflect on progress, strengths, and opportunities for embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach across policy and practice.

- ▶ Engage with local Trauma Lead Officers, Trauma Champions, TPTICS and other relevant professionals that have expertise in embedding a trauma-informed approach across policy and practice. More information about these

roles can be found on the National Trauma Transformation Programme website.

▶ Encourage decision-makers involved in the placemaking process to complete the freely accessible online learning developed by the National Trauma Transformation Programme.

# Useful resources

- ► National Trauma Transformation Programme training and implementation resources

- ► Local Networks and Support for embedding a trauma-informed approach

- ► A range of briefings joining the dots across key policy agendas focused on improving outcomes for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity

- ► Our Place – Place Based Approaches

- ► Shaping Places for Wellbeing Place-Based Approach

- ► Planning for Place Programme

## Contact us

If you want to find out more or have any questions related to this briefing, please contact: **trauma@improvementservice.org.uk**