

Why reform must start with children and families: A local government call to action



Executive Summary

This report sets out the ambition of the Solace Scotland / Improvement Service Transformation Programme and presents a clear, evidence-based case for accelerating public service reform in Scotland. It is intended to support senior leaders and partners to understand the scale of the challenge facing local government, where reform can deliver the greatest impact, and the specific actions required now to enable sustainable change.

Local government in Scotland is operating under sustained and intensifying pressure. A complex statutory landscape, rising demand, demographic change, workforce constraints and sustained financial pressure on spending power are collectively limiting councils' ability to sustain services and invest in prevention. The evidence is clear that incremental improvement within existing models will not be sufficient. Reform must now happen at greater pace and scale.

This report focuses on children and families as the area where reform can have the greatest immediate and long-term impact—particularly through tackling child poverty and strengthening the role of active communities. Starting here offers the strongest opportunity to shift the system away from crisis response towards early intervention, whole-family support and better long-term outcomes, in line with Christie principles and national policy intent. The sector already has strong foundations to build on, including place-based approaches, partnership working, community-led models and data-enabled early intervention.

However, the report is explicit that local government cannot deliver reform in isolation. While councils are committed to working differently, progress at scale depends on wider system change. The evidence gathered through this programme points to a small number of critical conditions that must now be addressed if reform is to be viable:

- Greater stability and appropriate flexibility in funding, including multi-year, outcomes-focused funding aligned to shared national and local priorities.
- Reduced fragmentation in national policy and governance, moving away from siloed approaches, short-term pilots and compliance-heavy frameworks towards coherent national–local arrangements that support integration and learning.
- Removal of legal, policy and operational barriers that currently constrain data sharing, joint working and innovative delivery models, alongside a more deliberate approach to modernising statutory duties where these no longer reflect how services need to operate.
- A clear, system-wide commitment to prevention, embedded consistently across education, health and social care, and reflected in national priorities, funding decisions and accountability frameworks.

- Targeted and sustainable investment in capacity and capability for reform, aligned to prevention, productivity and long-term value.

Alongside these asks of the Scottish Government, the report also sets out clear expectations of public service partners. Sustainable reform requires shared leadership, long-term commitment, aligned budgets, joint accountability and a collective willingness to work differently with communities. Transactional, short-term approaches will continue to undermine impact unless there is an explicit shift towards relational, trust-based ways of working.

The report draws on national research, sector intelligence and practical learning from transformation activity already underway, including Fairer Futures Partnerships and other local tests of change. These examples demonstrate that reform is possible, that new ways of working are already emerging, and that outcomes improve when leadership, evidence and partnership align. They also make clear that culture change—across leadership, workforce and systems—is not optional but a core enabler of prevention and reform.

The message of this report is therefore both urgent and pragmatic. The evidence is strong, the risks of inaction are growing, and the opportunity to act is now. Public service reform must be prioritised and accelerated—starting with children and families—and delivered collaboratively, boldly and with a relentless focus on improving outcomes for Scotland's communities.



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1. Introduction

This report sets out a clear, evidence-based assessment of the current local government landscape and identifies practical opportunities to accelerate public service reform within an increasingly constrained operating environment. It is intended to build understanding of the scale and nature of the pressures facing the sector, while signalling where focused, collective action by Solace Scotland and its partners can deliver the greatest impact.

Solace Scotland is clear that meaningful reform is essential to improving outcomes for communities and that this cannot be achieved by any single organisation acting alone. Delivery at scale will depend on strengthened national and local partnership arrangements, including more effective use of existing governance structures such as the Community Planning Improvement Board to align priorities, remove system barriers and support collective leadership across agencies. Chief Executives are aligned in their view that the most immediate and high-impact opportunities for reform lie within children and families' services—particularly in tackling child poverty and strengthening the role of active communities. Starting here offers the greatest scope for prevention, enabling a shift away from responding to crisis towards addressing the root causes of inequality, in line with the Christie Commission's call for preventative, person-centred public services. This direction is reinforced by a growing pipeline of place-based, community-led initiatives, including Fairer Futures Partnerships, which demonstrate both appetite and readiness across the sector for system-wide preventative reform.

This report is a product of the Solace/Improvement Service Transformation Programme. Its three interconnected pillars—an officer-led national conversation on public service reform, short-term local government transformation projects, and focused leadership development— together underpin the sector's reform ambitions and provide a platform for sustained change. Community Planning Partnerships provide the primary mechanism for aligning local delivery across agencies. There is an opportunity to strengthen their role as system leaders of reform, connecting national ambition with place-based delivery and ensuring partners are collectively accountable for outcomes.

While the scale and complexity of local government transformation should not be underestimated, there are clear opportunities for meaningful 'quick wins'. Targeted, practical projects can improve services now, build confidence, and create momentum for longer-term system change. Six short-term transformation projects are currently being delivered across local government, each embedded within the wider officer-led reform conversation. Collectively, these projects are strengthening collaborative behaviours, building capability for more complex change, and laying the foundations for sustainable reform.

The programme's Tackling Cause Not Symptoms report sets out a compelling case for

change, demonstrating why the current model of public services is financially unsustainable. Demographic change, widening health inequalities and rising costs are driving a fundamental shift in public expenditure, with an increasing share allocated to health and a corresponding decline in funding for education, social protection and wider local services—many of which play a critical preventative role. The Scottish Fiscal Commission highlights both a growing and persistent funding gap and the intensifying pressures created by climate-related costs and new health technologies.

At the same time, national funding trends have further constrained local government's financial position. Scottish Government funding for local government has not kept pace with inflation, demand or policy commitments, resulting in a sustained erosion of spending power over more than a decade. Recent spending plans place Local Government at the bottom of national funding priorities, with real-terms reductions and an absolute cash decrease over the next spending period, in sharp contrast to significant uplifts in other portfolios. This divergence signals increasing pressure on councils' ability to sustain services and invest in reform.

In this context, the sector is at a critical moment. The Accounts Commission has been clear that transformation must now happen at greater pace and scale, and that councils cannot deliver this alone. With no improvement in the financial outlook anticipated, this report takes a pragmatic stance—focusing on children and families through a child poverty lens and placing active communities at the heart of reform. This recognises that lasting change depends on the interconnectedness of education, housing, health, the economy and other key policy areas.

The challenges facing families are systemic and deeply interrelated. Rising living costs, fragmented support, workforce pressures and inconsistent access to services continue to limit progress, particularly for families with additional support needs and those in rural or disadvantaged areas. Child poverty remains unacceptably high, affecting one in four children and breaching children's rights, with long-term consequences for life chances and increasing pressure on public services. Without a more targeted, preventative and integrated approach—one that connects services around families and communities—these inequalities will continue to deepen.

Incremental change will not be sufficient. Reform must be ambitious, grounded in lived experience and underpinned by a shared commitment to dignity, equity and opportunity for every child in Scotland. This report sets out the constraints within which local government is operating and identifies where, collectively, the sector can be bold in driving reform.

2. Our Approach

The programme was borne out of the Improvement Service's paper on delivering a future for local authorities, which outlined the context within which councils are operating, the challenges and opportunities they face and how they might transition to a model of service delivery that builds on current success but more deliberately supports effective partnerships to improve outcomes for communities.

This paper, co-authored by the Improvement Service and seven local authority Chief Executives, identified six anchors as key building blocks for transformation, and these have been at the heart of our transformation programme ever since:

- Unlock community action
- Enable a functioning, trusted local and central government relationship
- Design for people's needs
- Create digital, design and technology-enabled transformation
- Tackle inequality and meet the needs of all citizens
- Lead council and cross-sector partnerships with a focus on outcomes

These anchors are central to the three planks of the transformation programme: an officer-led conversation on public service reform, short-term local government transformation projects and focused leadership development.

An officer-led conversation aims to bring together leaders from across local government and Community Planning Partners to develop a shared roadmap for public service reform, while identifying new approaches to tackle inequalities.

This conversation is led by a small group of local authority Chief Executives and grounded firmly in robust evidence. A comprehensive mix of national research, sector intelligence, professional insight, and practical learning from local pilots underpins the work. Combined, this robust evidence base ensures our narrative is rooted in both rigorous analysis and real-world practice.

Our evidence gathering began with a round-table discussion on public service reform, bringing together local authority Chief Executives, their counterparts in statutory Community Planning Partner organisations and senior Scottish Government and COSLA officials, convened by Solace Scotland and the Improvement Service.

We then published our report, [Tackling Cause Not Symptoms](#), which provides a snapshot of the state of the nation and presents an overarching assessment of current challenges and opportunities across the system. This was complemented by a sector-wide survey on public service reform activity that is underway in local authorities, offering quantitative data on operational activity, trends, and pressure points.

To deepen our understanding of thematic and emerging issues across the social determinants of health, the project group supporting the Chief Executives utilised short-life working groups of professionals to explore existing legislation, guidance, policy, frameworks, models of service delivery and potential reform levers. Additional strategic insight came from discussion at a Solace Scotland branch meeting, offering a Head of Paid Service perspectives on priorities, system capacity, and potential support requirements.

Recognising the importance of lived experience and local context, the project group analysed intelligence on local authorities' relationships with communities, ensuring that community voice, expectations, and engagement approaches were meaningfully reflected in our thinking. This was reinforced by the practical learning generated through the Glasgow City, Clackmannanshire, and Dundee City Fairer Futures Partnership pilots, which provided essential operational insights into what works in practice and what conditions are required for successful implementation.

We also incorporated evidence from extensive engagement with key stakeholders, including local government professional organisations, which offered specialist and practice-based commentary, ensuring alignment with sector standards and professional expectations. To broaden this further, we examined UK and international reform examples, capturing lessons from comparable systems and identifying transferable elements relevant to our context.

Taken together, this diverse and substantial body of evidence demonstrates the depth of work undertaken. It reflects rigorous research, extensive engagement, and a triangulation of high-quality sources, enabling us to proceed with confidence, clarity, and a strong platform for decision-making and reform.

3. Current Situation

Statutory Duties and Powers

Councils operate within a complex statutory framework that shapes service delivery. When clearly understood and applied deliberately, this framework provides a strong foundation and enabler for public service reform—ensuring change is lawful, resilient and scalable.

The Duties and Powers project within the Solace/IS Transformation Programme is a key enabler of reform. It provides a shared legislative framework across all workstreams, grounding change proposals in a consistent understanding of statutory duties and discretionary powers. This clarity supports confident decision-making, reduces duplication and strengthens the case for innovation. By identifying where duties lack digital solutions, where shared platforms are viable and where legal interpretation is required, the project actively enables digital reform, shared services and collaborative procurement. It connects evidence, law, design and delivery to ensure reform is feasible and properly sequenced.

While the scale of statutory responsibilities can influence the pace of change, it also highlights where reform effort can deliver the greatest impact. In some areas, legislation has not kept pace with modern service delivery or technological capability. The duties and powers work helps surface these opportunities, providing an evidence-based foundation for dialogue with COSLA and the Scottish Government on where legislative modernisation could enable more flexible, preventative and efficient approaches.

Where legislative change is required, councils must continue to meet their statutory responsibilities. This makes clarity, alignment and sequencing essential. The duties and powers project supports this by identifying where improvements can be made within existing duties and powers and where longer-term reform would benefit from legislative change.

Children's services and education alone account for over 90 statutory and discretionary duties (Appendix 1), spanning safeguarding, rights-based practice, corporate parenting, early intervention, education delivery, additional support needs and regulation. These duties define the system within which reform must succeed. As statutory responsibilities continue to expand—particularly in relation to rights, wellbeing and education reform—the duties and powers approach provides essential transparency, helping councils manage cumulative impact, reduce governance pressure and identify opportunities to deliver outcomes more effectively.

The duties and powers portal brings this intelligence together in a single authoritative reference point, strengthening consistency, supporting reform design and underpinning informed engagement with partners. Taken together, the statutory framework does not simply set limits—it provides the structure through which sustainable reform can be achieved, supported by continued partnership with COSLA, the Scottish Government and other public service partners.

Policy Context

Local authorities operate within a complex and evolving national policy environment. Overlapping policies and evolving governance arrangements can create duplication and additional delivery complexity. Overlapping policies, unclear governance and policy proliferation create duplication, ambiguity and additional delivery burden. This complexity is compounded by short-term funding models applied to long-term challenges, affordability and sustainability pressures, and performance frameworks that prioritise short-term activity over longer-term outcomes. Collectively, these factors increase system strain and make it harder to align effort or demonstrate meaningful impact. In this context, excessive layering, mapping and compliance activity can distract from effective practice, limiting the system's ability to focus on outcomes and learning.

The number, range and complexity of the key policy frameworks relating to children's services and education is captured in Appendix 2.

Universalism

Universal provision has long been a feature of public policy in Scotland, with a wide range of entitlements available to residents regardless of income or employment status. Both the number and scope of these entitlements have increased over time, particularly in the past five years. Table 1 summarises the main universal entitlements currently in place and highlights where provision has been introduced or extended. Many of these entitlements are delivered through local authority funding and service infrastructure. Where available funding does not fully align with levels of demand or delivery costs, this can place additional pressure on already constrained budgets, particularly in high-demand service areas such as social care. At the same time, approaches based on universal eligibility can support higher take-up among groups who might not otherwise access services, where means-tested approaches may create barriers related to complexity or stigma. Evidence from areas such as early learning and childcare and free school meals suggests that universal access can play a preventative role, helping families maintain stability and reducing the risk of poverty.

The cumulative expansion of universal entitlements has increased overall expenditure and may give rise to further cost pressures as demand continues to evolve. These pressures operate within a wider policy and delivery environment characterised by multiple statutory requirements and policies and differing local delivery models, which can complicate system-wide change.

In this context, financial constraints across public services can encourage short-term responses rather than sustained investment in prevention, while short-term funding and pilot approaches may constrain the ability to sustain longer-term reform. Delivering meaningful reform requires clarity of purpose, coordination across partners, and a focus on outcomes rather than activity or compliance alone. Without this, reform risks remaining ambitious in intent but uneven in delivery.

Table 1. Summary of Scottish universal entitlements

Service Area	Service Provision	Introduction and changes	Introduced or expanded in the past 5 years	Delivered via local authority budgets
Childcare	Funded early years childcare for 3–4-year-olds	Expanded to offer 1,140 hours per year. Originally expanded to 600 hours in 2014, a phased expansion from 2017/18, full expansion to 1,140 by August 2021 (2021/22).	Yes	Yes
Education	Free school meals	Provision for P1-P3 from 2015, expanded to P4 and P5 in August 2021 (2021/22 financial year). Potential future expansion to P6 and P7	Yes	Yes
Education	Free music tuition	Fees for instrumental music tuition were abolished in 2021/22.	Yes	Yes
Social Care	Free personal and nursing care	Available for over 65 since 2002, expanded in 2019 (2019/20 Frank's Law) to any adult assessed as needing the service regardless of age, condition, capital or income.	Yes	Yes
Transport	Free bus travel for under-22s	National Entitlement Card (NEC) expanded free bus travel to young people in 2022. Previously introduced for those over 60 and those with disabilities in 2006.	Yes	No - but local authorities administer NEC cards through NEC Programme Office
Welfare & Benefits	Free baby box	Introduced in 2017 providing a box of newborn essentials to every newborn baby.	No	No
Health	Free prescriptions	Prescription charges abolished in 2011, making access to medication universally free.	No	No
Health	Free NHS eye tests	Universally available to all residents from 2006, removing cost barriers to basic eye care.	No	No
Education	Free university tuition	Tuition fees abolished in 2008 for Scottish domiciled undergraduate students.	No	No

Children and Families Operating Environment

Solace Scotland is focusing reform through a children and families lens, with particular emphasis on tackling child poverty and strengthening the role of active communities. The operating environment must be understood within Scotland's shifting demographics. The population stood at 5.436 million in the 2022 Census and is projected to grow modestly to 5.8 million by 2047, driven entirely by migration, before entering long-term decline from around 2051. The number of children (aged 15 and under) is projected to decrease year on year, with an overall decrease of 9% by 2047 (almost 80,000 children). This trajectory, and the uneven impact across all 32 local authorities, adds complexity to service planning and transformation.

Sector priorities are grounded in the evidence generated through this programme, drawing together national research, professional insight, sector-wide engagement and practical learning. While many issues cut across wider social determinants of health, the following challenges are specific to children and families:

- **Access and equity:** Persistent barriers to timely, appropriate support, particularly for marginalised groups.
- **Workforce pressures:** Recruitment, retention and wellbeing challenges, driven by an ageing workforce, low pay and undervaluation.
- **Financial instability:** Chronic underfunding, short-term and ring-fenced funding, and rising costs undermine sustainability and innovation.
- **Data and coordination:** Fragmented systems, limited data sharing and inconsistent use of evidence constrain targeted intervention and improvement.
- **Community voice and participation:** Co-design ambitions are often undermined by consultation fatigue, low trust and structural barriers.
- **Capacity and skills:** Insufficient investment in workforce and community capability, leadership and succession planning.
- **Geographic variation:** Distinct challenges in rural, remote and island communities affect access, workforce supply and service delivery.
- **Trust and reputation:** Strained relationships between local government and communities, driven by repeated engagement without visible change.

Early Years Systemic Challenges

- **Limited Strategic Recognition of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)**

ELC is often viewed narrowly as “childcare,” rather than as a strategic lever for prevention, early intervention, and reducing inequality.

- **Post-COVID Complexity**

The pandemic has exacerbated developmental delays and increased the complexity of family needs. Families require more specialist support but face long waiting lists and complex systems.

- **Cost of Living and Child Poverty**

Sustained economic pressures continue to affect families’ ability to access and benefit from early years services.

- **Financial Sustainability Across Sectors**

Rising demand and costs threaten the sustainability of services across the public, private, and third sectors.

- **Data Gaps**

Better data and more effective use of data are needed to understand risks, opportunities, and service impact.

- **Challenges in Partnership Working**

Power imbalances, funding disparities, and sustainability concerns can hinder effective collaboration across sectors. These challenges are not organisational in isolation they reflect systemic barriers to effective multi-agency working. Fragmented governance, misaligned funding and differing accountability frameworks across partners continue to limit the ability to deliver genuinely integrated, whole-system support.

- **Service Design in Rural and Remote Areas**

Flexibility, staffing, and accessibility remain significant challenges in delivering equitable early years services in rural and island communities.

Education Reform Challenges

- **Systemic Misalignment and Confusion**

Multiple reviews and reform agendas have led to fragmentation and confusion. Misalignment between curriculum and qualifications reform continues to create uncertainty.

- **Lack of Parity Between Pathways**

Despite recommendations, vocational and academic pathways are not yet equally valued, leading to a lack of confidence and clarity in the system.

- **Agency Reform Uncertainty**

Ongoing reform of national education agencies has created ambiguity around roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

- **National vs. Local Reform Tensions**

Misalignment between national ambitions and local delivery creates mistrust and risks of blame when progress is uneven.

- **Stakeholder Engagement Gaps**

Meaningful engagement with learners, families, and practitioners is essential but remains inconsistent. Sustained change requires evidence of impact and co-production.

- **School Estate**

Building schools that won't be fit for purpose in the future for the way in which young people will want to learn such as the advancement of technology and role that plays in education.

- **Career Pathways**

Disconnect between job market opportunities/needs and Further Education /Higher Education courses.

- **Changing Demographics**

Scotland's changing youth demographics project a decline in the under-15 population by ~20% over the next two decades. This will have implications on the way in which councils deliver children's services, for example, there will be smaller school rolls which will impact on the maximisation of the school estate.

Participation & Co-production Challenges

Councils play a critical role in helping communities thrive, connect and engage in civic life, bridging differences in place, identity and interest. Upholding children's rights—particularly under UNCRC Article 12—requires meaningful engagement that listens to and values children's voices. However, delivering this well often depends on specialist skills, time and support, which have been eroded by sustained funding pressures.

Despite strong policy ambition, community participation and co-production are not yet embedded consistently. Concerns about risk, capacity, cost and managing expectations can inhibit more relational approaches, limiting confidence to share power and work differently.

As a result, engagement often reaches the same organised or vocal groups, while those with quieter voices, lived experience of inequality, or mistrust of statutory services remain under-represented—reinforcing existing inequities rather than addressing them.

Evidence from community-led initiatives, including the mobilisation of mutual aid during the pandemic, shows the potential of communities as active partners in change. However, financial constraints, structural barriers and system fragmentation continue to hinder this potential. Addressing deprivation, discrimination and social isolation requires sustained investment in relationships, trust and community capability, with communities placed at the centre of how solutions are designed, delivered and sustained.

Enabling a Shift from Transactional to Relationship-Based Public Services

Sustainable public service reform requires more than structural change or new programmes. It depends on a deliberate shift in organisational culture—from predominantly transactional models of service delivery to relational, trust-based approaches rooted in partnership with communities.

Transactional approaches, characterised by episodic engagement, service-led solutions and short-term interventions, are increasingly misaligned with the complex, interconnected challenges facing children, families and communities. Evidence from this programme shows that such approaches can reinforce fragmentation, weaken trust and limit the potential for prevention and early intervention.

A relational approach recognises communities as active partners in shaping, delivering and sustaining change. It values lived experience alongside professional expertise and local knowledge, and is grounded in long-term relationships rather than one-off interactions. This is not a departure from statutory responsibility or accountability; it strengthens delivery by improving legitimacy, shared ownership and understanding of outcomes.

Delivering this shift requires a fundamental change in how local government engages with communities—moving beyond consultation towards sustained partnership. Communities must be involved earlier and more meaningfully in shaping priorities, solutions and measures of success, with greater recognition of local assets, strengths and informal networks, particularly among marginalised or less-heard groups.

Evidence from Fairer Futures Partnerships and other community-led models demonstrates that sharing power builds trust and improves outcomes. However, this requires explicit permission, time and support for leaders and staff to work differently, alongside a commitment to learning and adaptation rather than immediate certainty.

Culture change must be led from the top. Leaders at all levels must set clear expectations,

model relational behaviours and create psychologically safe environments that support experimentation and learning. This includes reframing how risk is understood—moving from procedural compliance towards informed professional judgement, transparency and shared risk with partners and communities.

This shift strengthens, rather than dilutes, accountability by grounding decisions in stronger relationships, clearer purpose and better insight. Leaders must actively enable test-and-learn approaches while maintaining alignment with wider system goals.

Workforce Capability and Everyday Practice

A relationship-based approach has clear implications for workforce capability. Relationship-building, listening, facilitation and collaboration must be recognised as core professional skills, and time spent building trust with communities valued as legitimate and necessary work that contributes to better outcomes and more effective use of public resources. Short-term funding cycles, workload pressures and fragmented structures risk undermining this unless actively addressed.

Redefining Success and Learning

Relational working also challenges how success is defined and evidenced. Traditional performance frameworks often struggle to capture prevention, trust-building and system change. Embedding culture change therefore requires greater use of qualitative insight, lived experience and learning narratives alongside quantitative data.

Without a sustained shift from transactional to relationship-based working, public service reform will remain ambitious in intent but uneven in delivery. Culture change is not optional; it is a core enabler of prevention, partnership and long-term impact. The examples in this report show this shift is already underway. The task now is to support, normalise and scale these behaviours through leadership, capability investment, aligned incentives and a shared commitment to working differently with communities to improve outcomes for children and families.

4. Opportunities

Through the evidence gathered, Solace Scotland has identified immediate, high-impact opportunities to reform children and families' services—starting with tackling child poverty and strengthening active communities. This is an essential first step in shifting the system from responding to the symptoms of inequality to addressing its root causes.

Scaling these opportunities will require coordinated system leadership. There is a clear role for national and regional collaborative structures, including the Community Planning Improvement Board, to support alignment, remove duplication and accelerate shared learning across areas.

The evidence gathered shows that the sector has already identified opportunities that can shape a wider roadmap for reform. Examples can be found in appendix 3. Delivering on these will require a range of actions, including some that lie beyond local government's direct control and will therefore require clear 'asks' of other stakeholders. This report sets out proposals to move forward with reform.



5. Measuring Progress, Learning and Reform Readiness

Workstream 1 proposes that reform should be assessed not only on what is delivered, but on whether the conditions for sustainable change are being established, consistent with national expectations for prevention-led and learning-led reform.

Measurement should therefore focus on a small, deliberate set of system-level indicators to understand whether reform is genuinely shifting practice and outcomes.

This includes evidence of: improved outcomes for children and families; reduced duplication and fragmentation; increased workforce stability and capacity; stronger partnership working; and improved trust and experience among communities and practitioners. Learning from local tests of change should be captured systematically and used to inform decisions about scaling, adaptation or pause, ensuring that reform remains responsive and evidence-led rather than fixed or compliance-driven.

Practical measurement framework

Illustrative areas for monitoring and learning include:

- Outcomes and experience: evidence of improved outcomes for children and families and improved service experience, informed by data and lived experience.
- Demand and prevention: indicators of reduced escalation to crisis services and improved early support.
- System coherence: reductions in duplication, clearer pathways and improved cross-service alignment.
- Workforce capacity and culture: staff stability, wellbeing, and confidence to work relationally and across boundaries.
- Learning and adaptation: evidence that learning from local practice is informing wider reform decisions.

Taken together, this approach supports reform that is accountable, adaptive and grounded in evidence, while avoiding the risks associated with premature scaling or compliance-driven delivery. This approach requires shared measurement frameworks across partners, ensuring that progress is assessed collectively rather than within organisational silos, with joint accountability for outcomes agreed through Community Planning structures.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Local government stands at a critical turning point. The financial pressures facing the sector are intensifying, and the difficult decisions required in the years ahead cannot be met with incremental change. Action is needed now. Councils remain firmly committed to creating sustainable services that protect and support those who need them most, but this will only be achievable through a decisive shift in how we work, how we prioritise, and how we reform.

Public service reform must begin with children and families. The evidence gathered throughout this programme is unequivocal: the greatest opportunities for prevention, long-term impact, and system-wide improvement lie in this space. Our analysis provides a clear, robust understanding of both the challenges we face and the areas where local government, working with partners, can unlock meaningful change. The examples set out in this report demonstrate not only what is possible, but what is already working on the ground. They offer practical proof of new ways of working—more collaborative, more preventative, and more responsive to need.

However, delivering reform at scale requires more than innovation within councils. Communities must understand the context in which local government is now operating, and be supported to play an active role in shaping solutions. Likewise, public service partners must be willing to work differently, share responsibility, and align effort behind common goals. The Community Planning Improvement Board provides a vehicle to progress this through their refreshed objectives. The refreshed role of the Community Planning Improvement Board provides a key mechanism to support this shift, offering a national platform to strengthen accountability, align priorities, and address systemic barriers to effective partnership working across agencies.

The foundations for progress already exist. Work is underway across Scotland that shows what can be achieved when leadership, evidence, and partnership come together with purpose and ambition. The task now is to harness this momentum, align it with a coherent national approach, and accelerate the changes required to secure sustainable services for the future.

The message of this report is clear: the evidence is strong, the need is urgent, and the opportunity is in front of us. Meaningful change must be prioritised and accelerated now - starting with children and families - and it must be delivered collaboratively, boldly, and with a relentless focus on improving outcomes for Scotland's communities.

Commitments of Solace Scotland

Solace Scotland will take a decisive leadership role in shaping the next phase of reform for local government, building on the evidence based, ambitious programme of work focused on children and families. The commitments below set out how the sector will build the conditions for system-wide change, strengthen the legislative and operational foundations of reform, and ensure that learning from across Scotland is translated into sustainable practice.

1. Strengthening the Legislative Foundations for Reform

Working with the Improvement Service, Solace Scotland will lead a comprehensive review of the statutory duties that apply to children and families' services, assessing where existing legislation could be modernised to better support delivery of rights-based, preventative and outcomes-focused services. This work will be undertaken in partnership with professional associations and sector experts to ensure any proposals for legislative reform are robust, evidence-led and grounded in operational reality.

Where statutory responsibilities are shared with Community Planning Partners, Solace Scotland will convene cross-agency discussions to ensure a coherent and collaborative approach, supporting the work of the national Community Planning Improvement Board.

2. Driving Service Redesign Through Sector-Led Collaboration

Building on the insights from Fairer Futures Partnerships and the work underway already through the Solace/IS transformation programme, Solace Scotland will work closely with relevant professional associations to identify opportunities for service redesign that streamline pathways, reduce duplication and improve outcomes for families. This includes examining where statutory duties could be delivered differently through shared services, regional models, or once-for-the-sector approaches - particularly in areas such as digital services, assessment processes and administrative operations.

There is also an opportunity to better integrate work around disability and family support, drawing on emerging learning from initiatives such as the exploration of a national service for Blue Badge administration, to ensure systems work more effectively for families with additional support needs.

3. Enhancing Capacity for Innovation and Change

Transformation cannot be delivered at scale without targeted investment in capacity and capability for change from operational to leadership roles. Solace Scotland will champion approaches that temporarily boost system capacity - such as secondments, providing volunteer capacity to the Solace/IS Transformation Programme and cross council partnerships - to support

design, implementation and evaluation of reform. This aligns with the “test and learn” practice emerging.

This focus on capacity and capability will help councils build the skills required for whole-system reform, enabling them to redesign processes, address duplication, reduce unnecessary assessments and referrals, and strengthen coherence across services.

4. Embedding Coherence Between Internal Systems and External Partners

Solace Scotland recognises that multi-agency collaboration is essential for reform both in terms of objectives and the funding to deliver - but internal coherence is equally vital. Local authorities must ensure that their own structures, processes and decision-making systems are aligned to support partnership working and designed from a person-centred perspective. Chief Executive's will strengthen internal alignment so that collaborative approaches can take root and thrive.



Asks of Scottish Government

To enable meaningful and sustainable public service reform, Scottish local government requires a streamlined, more coherent national framework that supports preventative approaches, reduces duplication, and strengthens collaboration across wider public services. The following priorities set out where Scottish Government action is essential to unlock progress.

1. Commit to Greater Flexibility and Stability in Funding Arrangements commit to multi-year funding with increased flexibility to support locally integrated delivery within agreed national priorities

Scottish Government should commit to multi-year, flexibility within agreed national priorities across shared Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnership priorities, enabling partners to align budgets, plan longer term and deliver joined-up prevention and whole-family support.

2. Remove Legal and Policy Barriers to Integration and Innovation

Scottish Government should review and amend legal, policy, procurement and public-finance rules that currently limit joint working, data sharing, and innovative models of delivery. Moving from process-based compliance to outcome-focused national frameworks—supported by shared standards, interoperable systems, and clear national guidance—would enable greater local flexibility, integration and preventative approaches.

As the Solace/IS Transformation Programme identifies further opportunities to modernise duties and strengthen digital and cross-sector integration, any future legislative reform should be considered in the context of existing legislation to avoid duplication and ensure coherence. This would help unlock innovation, support more joined-up services, and prevent new statutory requirements from overlapping with or contradicting what is already in place.

3. Enable System Reform by Reducing Siloed Governance

Scottish Government should enable genuine system reform by reducing siloed national governance, shifting away from short-term pilots, and establishing stronger joint national–local governance arrangements. This requires breaking down structural barriers that prevent local-level collaboration, replacing fragmented and burdensome short-term initiatives with sustained investment in preventative, community-based support, and creating a national–local governance mechanism to guide multi-agency reform, moving beyond existing structures that are narrowly aligned to specific portfolios. This should include local partners such as Police, Fire and NHS Boards. This should build on and strengthen existing structures, including the Community Planning Improvement Board, ensuring they are supported to operate as effective system leaders rather than advisory forums.

4. Make Prevention a National Priority

The Scottish Government should strengthen its national approach to prevention by embedding whole-family support across education, health and social care; prioritising community-based, early-intervention models within health and social care reform; and making long-term prevention a central political and fiscal priority. This requires explicitly including education and health services in national frameworks and funding arrangements for family support, shifting health reform towards locally delivered preventative approaches, and integrating prevention into national budgetary decision-making to ensure sustained, stable investment.

5. Strengthen the Conditions for Effective Public Service Reform

Scottish Government should strengthen the national–local reform environment by acting as an active partner in collaborative change, addressing structural and financial barriers, and investing in the workforce required to deliver transformation. This includes:

- Deepening national–local partnership working through early engagement, shared learning, and support for iterative, system-wide reform;
- Creating financial and policy conditions that incentivise prevention, including mechanisms that allow system-wide savings to be reinvested locally;
- Investing in national workforce and leadership capability, including a Public Service Reform Leadership Academy to build skills in systems thinking, digital, data and collaborative leadership; and
- Reviewing inspection and assurance regimes to ensure they support improvement, learning and integrated, place-based working.

Asks of Partners

To deliver meaningful, sustainable reform, partners across the public and third sectors must work collectively with local government to create the conditions for integrated, preventative, and community-focused approaches. The following asks set out where shared commitment and aligned action are required.

1. Strengthen Collaborative Leadership and Integrated Working

Accountable officers from statutory community planning partner organisations should come together to drive place-based reform, connecting to and supporting the work of the Community Planning Improvement Board.

2. Adopt a Long-Term, System-Wide Approach to Change

Public Service Reform must be recognised as a long-term endeavour. Partners are asked to:

- Support the scale-up of effective local practice through co-design, shared learning and incremental system development.
- Provide capacity for cross-city/place coordination, ensuring local partnerships and networks are consistently supported.
- Develop and maintain shared data, insight, evaluation and performance approaches to underpin local partnerships.
- Embed continuous learning and evaluation, committing to iterative improvement rather than short-term project thinking.
- Communicate change clearly and consistently across their organisations and communities.
- Approach budget setting in a collaborative way that enables public service reform.

This approach must be grounded in partnership with the people and communities who rely on services, ensuring reforms are shaped around their needs rather than organisational structures.

3. Support Cultural and Workforce Change Across Agencies

Multi-agency reform requires cultural and mindset shifts. Partners are encouraged to:

- Recognise that establishing joint teams or programmes is itself a significant change event that requires intentional leadership and active support.
- Invest time in building shared team cultures across organisations with different histories,

practices and expectations.

- Provide clarity on the purpose of multi-agency reform, agreeing on a single or small set of aims to be delivered collaboratively.
- Ensure staff are supported through transitions, with an understanding of the challenges and opportunities that reform will bring.

4. Build Trust, Transparency and Shared Accountability

Partners must commit to strengthening trust across the system. This includes:

- Being open about opportunities, challenges, learning, risks, and practice, avoiding defensive behaviours that can arise from concerns about scrutiny or resource implications.
- Demonstrating strong leadership and transparency to overcome early barriers to collaboration.
- Acknowledging that shifting from business-as-usual to more integrated ways of working requires time, support and shared accountability.

5. Jointly Review Statutory Duties and Opportunities for Redesign

Given the volume and complexity of joint statutory duties—particularly within children and families services—partners are invited to work with local government to:

- Review where shared duties could be delivered differently to improve outcomes.
- Identify opportunities for integrated or redesigned services.
- Align approaches to ensure reforms are coherent, equitable and sustainable across the whole system.

Further Reading

- [Delivering a Future for Scottish Local Authorities](#)
- [Tackling Cause Not Symptoms](#)
- [Thematic Learning From Fairer Future Partnerships Report](#)



Appendix 1. Duties and Powers for Children and Families

Further information can be found with the duties and powers portal.

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Report on Children's Rights	Councils must publish a report showing what they've done—and plan to do—to respect and promote children's rights, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This includes making sure their decisions and services don't go against children's rights, and taking steps to improve how those rights are upheld. They also need to make a version of the report that's easy for children to understand.	Statutory	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
Provide Services to Support Parenting Orders	Councils must make sure that the right support services are available when a court issues a parenting order. These services help parents follow the rules set out in the order—like attending parenting classes or getting extra support—so they can improve how they care for their children.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Oversee and Safeguard the Welfare of Privately Fostered Children	Councils must check on children who are being privately fostered—that means cared for by someone who isn't their parent or a close relative for more than 28 days. When they're told about these arrangements, they must make sure the child is safe and well looked after, and visit regularly to check everything is okay. Any officer of the Council who is authorised to visit foster children may inspect any premises in the area in which foster children are to be or are being kept. The Council may apply to a Sheriff for an order to remove a foster child if he or she is being or is about to be kept in unsuitable surroundings or by an unsuitable person.	Statutory	Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984
Impose Requirements Relating to Foster Children Within Private Fostering Arrangements	Councils can set rules for how children are cared for in private fostering arrangements. This means they can require things like proper accommodation, medical care, or limits on how many children are looked after, to make sure the child's needs are being met and they're safe.	Discretionary	Foster Children (Scotland) Act 1984
Establish and maintain an adoption service	Councils must provide an adoption service that supports children and families at every stage of the adoption journey. This includes assessing prospective adopters, matching children with suitable families, and offering both practical and financial support before and after adoption.		The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Assess the need for adoption support services when requested	If someone asks the council for help related to adoption—like emotional support, financial assistance, or practical advice—the council must look into what kind of support is needed. They then decide whether those needs mean services should be provided to help the child, the adoptive family, or others affected by the adoption.	Statutory	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
Treat the child's welfare as paramount in adoption decisions	When making decisions about adoption, councils must always put the child's wellbeing first—not just now, but throughout their life. This means thinking carefully about what's best for the child and considering their views, their parents' views, and the child's background, including religion, culture, and language.	Statutory	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
Consider practical alternatives before arranging adoption	Before arranging an adoption, councils must think carefully about whether there's a better option for the child's care and future. This means exploring other practical alternatives—like staying with extended family or receiving support at home—before deciding that adoption is the right path.	Statutory	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
Submit a report to the court when notified of an adoption application	When the council is told that someone has applied to adopt a child, they must send a report to the court. This report includes important details about the child, the adoption plan, and whether the adoption is in the child's best interests. It helps the court make a well-informed decision.	Statutory	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
Prepare and review an adoption support plan	If the council decides that adoption support is needed, they must create a plan that sets out what help will be provided—like counselling, financial support, or practical assistance. This plan must be reviewed regularly to make sure it still meets the needs of the child and family.	Statutory	Adoption Support Services and Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009
Apply for Permanence Orders, including with Authority to Adopt	Councils can apply to the court for a Permanence Order when a child needs long-term care away from their birth family. This legal order lets the council decide where the child lives and can transfer some or all parental rights and responsibilities to the council, the child's carers, or the parents. If the order includes Authority to Adopt, it also allows the council to arrange for the child to be adopted.	Discretionary	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Looked After Children	When a child is under the care of the council, their safety and wellbeing must come first. The council must listen to the child, their parents, siblings, and others close to them, and take their views seriously. They also need to respect the child's background, including their culture, religion, and language.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Promote and Support Relationships for Looked After Children	Councils must help children in their care stay connected with important people in their lives. This includes parents, brothers and sisters, and others they have close relationships with. The council must take practical steps to support these relationships, as long as it's safe and in the child's best interests.	Statutory	Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Assess a Child's Circumstances and Refer to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)	If the council is worried that a child might need protection or extra support, they must look into the situation and gather information. If they think the child might need legal supervision or help, they must pass that information to the Scottish Children's Reporter, who decides whether the case should go to a children's hearing.	Statutory	Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
Implement Compulsory Supervision Orders and Request Reviews Where Appropriate	When a child is under a compulsory supervision order, the council must make sure the order is followed and the child gets the support they need. This includes arranging services, monitoring the child's situation, and asking for a review of the order if things change—like if the order isn't working, if adoption is being considered, or if the child is in secure accommodation and no longer needs to be.	Statutory	Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
Prepare and Review a Children's Services Plan Every Three Years	Every three years, councils must prepare a children's services plan with the aim of providing services which best safeguard, support and promote the wellbeing of children in its area. This includes making sure services are in place to keep children safe, healthy, and well cared for. Councils must also work with other organisations, service providers, and Scottish Ministers, and the plan must be kept under review. The Council must provide children's services and related services in accordance with the plan. The Council must report on its compliance with the plan every year.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide and Promote Family Group Decision Making Services	Councils must offer and promote services that help families come together to make plans for children who may be at risk of going into care. These Family Group Decision Making services give families a chance to talk, share ideas, and agree on what support is needed—so children can stay safe and well, ideally within their family network.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Publish information on Parenting Support Services for Families of Children at Risk of Becoming Looked After	Councils must offer and share information about services that help parents care for their children—especially when there's a risk the child might need to go into care. This includes support for families before a baby is born. The aim is to help parents build skills and confidence, so children can grow up safely and well within their families.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide Kinship Care Assistance and Publish Information About Available Support	Councils must support relatives or close family friends who care for children when their parents can't. This includes giving advice, helping with legal costs if they apply for a Kinship Care Order, and offering financial and emotional support. Councils must also make sure families know what help is available and how to get it.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide Kinship Care Allowance to Kinship Carers of Eligible Children Holding a Kinship Care Order	Councils must give financial help to relatives or close family friends who have legal responsibility for a child through a Kinship Care Order. This allowance helps cover the costs of caring for the child and may also help with legal fees. Councils must also make sure carers know what support is available and how to get it.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Prepare, Publish, Review, and Report on a Corporate Parenting Plan	Councils must give financial help to relatives or close family friends who have legal responsibility for a child through a Kinship Care Order. This allowance helps cover the costs of caring for the child and may also help with legal fees. Councils must also make sure carers know what support is available and how to get it.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide Evidence and Reports in Matters Relating to a Child's Care and Upbringing	When a court is deciding what's best for a child, it can ask the council to provide information or reports to help with that decision. The council must look into the child's situation and share what it finds—like whether the child needs protection or support—so the court has the evidence it needs to make the right choice. The Court may require the person who furnished the report to appear and be examined on oath regarding any matter dealt with in the report.	Statutory	Matrimonial Proceedings (Children) (Scotland) Act 1958
Support Adult and Young Carers Through Support Plans and Provision of Services	Councils must support people who care for others—whether they're adults or young carers—by offering a personalised support plan. This plan looks at what help the carer needs to stay healthy and well, and to balance caring with other parts of life. If support is needed, the council must provide it or help the carer find it. Councils must also make sure carers know what support is available and how to get it.	Statutory	Carers (Scotland) Act 2016
Publish Local Carers Eligibility Criteria and Details of Support Available	Councils must decide and share the rules they use to work out when carers can get support. These rules—called eligibility criteria—help make sure support is given fairly and consistently. Even if a carer doesn't meet the threshold for full support, councils must still offer advice and information to help them in their caring role. The criteria must be reviewed regularly to keep them up to date.	Statutory	Carers (Scotland) Act 2016

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Produce Annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports	Every year, councils must work with health boards to publish a Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR) showing what they're doing to tackle child poverty in their area. This includes actions already taken, plans for the future, and support for families who may face extra challenges. Councils must also involve local communities and people with lived experience of poverty to help shape the report.	Statutory	Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017
Provide secure accommodation for young people	Councils must place a child in secure care if they meet strict legal criteria—like being at serious risk of absconding or harming themselves or others. These settings provide close supervision and support to help young people stay safe and get the help they need. This decision must be based on evidence and follow legal rules. If the child is placed without a prior order, the council must quickly inform the Children's Reporter and arrange a hearing to review the placement. Secure care should only be used when no other option can meet the young person's needs.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Apply for and implement Child Protection Orders (CPOs)	If a child is believed to be at serious risk of harm, the council can apply to the court for a Child Protection Order. This legal order allows the child to be removed from danger and kept safe. Once the order is granted, the council must make sure the child is protected and cared for while the situation is assessed.	Statutory	Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011
Safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and support their families	Councils must help children who need extra support to stay safe, healthy, and well cared for. This includes providing services to the child and their family, such as practical help, advice, or financial assistance, especially when the child's wellbeing or development is at risk.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Provide Continuing Care to Eligible Care Leavers	Councils must support young people who've been in care by offering them the chance to stay in care until they're 21. This is called continuing care, and it helps young people move into adulthood gradually, with the stability and support they need to succeed in areas like housing, education, and relationships.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide Aftercare to Young People Who Have Left Care	Councils must support young people after they leave care to help them live independently and thrive. This includes offering advice, guidance, and practical help with things like housing, education, and employment. The support is tailored to each young person's needs and can continue into early adulthood.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Appoint a Chief Social Work Officer	Councils must appoint a senior social work professional to oversee the quality and safety of social work services. This person—called the Chief Social Work Officer—makes sure that decisions about care and protection are made properly and that services meet legal and professional standards.	Statutory	Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968
Consider the Views of the Child in All Decisions	Councils must listen to what children think and feel when making decisions that affect them. This includes asking for their views in a way that suits their age and understanding, and taking those views seriously when planning care, support, or legal actions.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Collaborate with Children and Families in Assessments and Support Planning	Councils must work with children and their families when planning care and support. This means listening to their views, understanding their needs, and making sure any help provided is tailored to what works best for them.	Statutory	Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013
Use and Promote Wellbeing Indicators in Assessing and Supporting Children's Wellbeing	Councils must use a set of wellbeing indicators to understand how children are doing and what support they might need. These indicators help build a full picture of the child's life—covering things like safety, health, learning, and relationships—and guide decisions about care and support.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide Named Person Service	Councils must make sure every child and young person has someone they can go to for help or advice about their wellbeing. This person—called a Named Person—is usually a health visitor or teacher and acts as a point of contact for families. The service is offered to everyone, but families don't have to use it if they don't want to.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Promote children and young people's wellbeing by enabling access to opportunities, support, and services	Councils must actively work to improve the overall wellbeing of children and young people in their area. It involves creating conditions where they can thrive by ensuring they have access to education, health care, recreational activities, and social support. The focus is on removing barriers and connecting families to services that help meet physical, emotional, and social needs. By doing this, authorities aim to give every child the best possible start in life and support their development into healthy, confident adults.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Ensure Children Have the Same Protection from Assault as Adults	Councils must ensure that children are given the same legal protection from being hit or physically punished as adults. They must make sure people understand that physical punishment of children is against the law and to promote positive, non-violent ways of caring for children. They must update child protection policies to reflect this change, work with schools, health services and the police to keep children safe, and take action if a child is harmed.	Statutory	Children (Equal protection from assault) (Scotland) Act 2019

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Prevent criminalisation and protect children under 12	Councils have a duty to prevent criminalisation and focus on care and early intervention for children under the age of 12. This means ensuring children under 12 do not receive a criminal record, working with families, schools and social services to provide support, and taking steps to safeguard their wellbeing. Any response to harmful behaviour by a child should be about protection and help, not punishment. This approach allows children to learn and grow without the stigma of a criminal conviction, while still keeping communities safe through appropriate care and supervision.	Statutory	Age of criminal responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019
Safeguard children's welfare in matrimonial proceedings	Councils have a responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children involved in matrimonial proceedings, such as divorce or separation cases. This means ensuring that decisions made by the court or by parents put the child's best interests first. Councils may be asked to provide reports or advice to the court about a child's circumstances, living arrangements, and wellbeing. The focus is on protecting the child from harm, reducing stress during family disputes, and making sure their voice is heard where appropriate.	Statutory	The Matrimonial Proceedings (Children) Act 1958
Secure Improvement in the Quality of School Education	Councils must work to improve the quality of education in their schools. This means regularly reviewing how well schools are performing, supporting teachers and staff, and making changes that help pupils learn better. Improvement can include things like updating teaching methods, providing training, using feedback from inspections, and working with parents and communities.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
Ensure education is directed to the full development of the child	Councils must make sure that education helps every child grow and reach their full potential. This means supporting not just academic learning, but also emotional, social, and physical development. Schools should create an environment where children feel safe, included, and encouraged to explore their interests and talents.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
Provide education to any young person of school age	The council must ensure that any young person who is still a school pupil receives an education. This includes identifying those not attending school and ensuring they have access to suitable education, either in school or through alternative provision. School education provided by an education authority shall be free of charge, except where the exceptions.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide prescribed learning hours	Councils must make sure every pupil for whom they are responsible receives at least the prescribed number of learning hours each school year. These prescribed hours will be set by Scottish Ministers in future regulations. In certain circumstances, councils may provide fewer hours—for example, if delivering the full hours would harm a pupil's wellbeing, if it is impracticable due to factors beyond the council's control, or in other situations defined by Ministers. Where reduced hours are allowed, councils must still provide at least the minimum reduced hours. Before reducing hours, councils must assess the impact on the child's wellbeing using the SHANARRI indicators (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included).	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 2016
Ensure access to early learning and childcare for eligible pre-school children	The council must ensure that all eligible preschool children can access 1,140 hours of free early learning and childcare per year. This entitlement applies to all 3- and 4-year-olds, and some 2-year-olds, and must be delivered in a way that is flexible, high-quality, and meets local needs. This includes securing enough places and supporting families to take up their entitlements	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Consult with parents of pre school children every 2 years about whether and if so how they should provide early learning and childcare	The council must consult with parents of preschool children at least every two years to understand how early learning and childcare should be delivered in their area. They must consider parents' views and publish a plan showing how they will provide this education and care.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Prepare and publish plans in relation to school provision following consultation with parents.	The council must prepare and publish a plan showing how they will provide early learning and childcare in their area after consulting with parents of preschool children. This plan should reflect parents' views and explain how the authority will meet local needs, including the 1,140 hours entitlement.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide for Pupils With Additional Support Needs	Councils must make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required for each pupil with additional support needs. When a child has attained the age of 12 years some provisions of the act can be exercised by the child if the education authority is satisfied that the child has capacity in relation to the provision. Certain persons may request that the council arrange for a child or young person to undergo a process of assessment or examination, and the council must comply. The Council must request and take account of information from appropriate agencies likely to make provisions for the pupil when they leave school. The Council has a duty to place a child with additional support needs in a school of the parents'/young person's choice unless various statutory criteria apply and a refusal of the request is appropriate.	Statutory	Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
Promote equity and reduce inequalities of educational outcomes	Councils must make sure all children and young people have fair chances to succeed in education, no matter their background. This means they must actively work to close gaps in things like school achievement, attendance, and access to learning that are often caused by poverty or other disadvantages. The goal is to make sure every learner—whether they live in a low-income area, have additional support needs, or face other challenges—gets the support they need to do well in school and beyond. Councils must consider these issues when making decisions about schools, budgets, and services, and show how they're helping to create a more equal education system.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 2016
Preserve the Gaelic Language	Councils must support the preservation and promotion of the Gaelic language. This includes working with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to develop and implement Gaelic Language Plans where required, and taking steps to encourage the use and visibility of Gaelic in education, signage, services, and cultural activities. The aim is to help protect and grow the language as part of Scotland's heritage and identity.	Statutory	Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide and Administer Free School Meals	Councils must give free school meals to children who qualify under Scottish Government rules, such as those in families receiving certain benefits (e.g., Universal Credit with low income, Income Support, or Scottish Child Payment). They also provide universal free meals for all pupils in Primary 1 to 5 and those in special schools, regardless of income. Councils are responsible for processing applications, confirming eligibility, and ensuring meals are available during the school day. They must take reasonable steps to protect the identity of pupils receiving free meals so that no child is singled out or stigmatised.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Education (Scotland) Act 2016
Promote health and nutrition in schools	Councils must make sure schools promote healthy lifestyles—like encouraging physical activity and emotional wellbeing—and provide food and drink that meet strict nutritional standards. They also need to promote school meals, protect the privacy of pupils who get free meals, and consider sustainability when choosing food. The goal is to help children grow up healthier and happier.	Statutory	Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007
Ensure seatbelts of dedicated school transport	Councils must ensure that every seat in vehicles used for school transport—like buses that take pupils to and from school or on school trips—has a seat belt. This law helps keep children safer while travelling. It doesn't apply to regular public buses, only to vehicles arranged specifically for school journeys.	Statutory	Seat Belts on School Transport (Scotland) Act 2017
Provide school Crossing Patrols	The council has the power to provide school crossing patrols to help children cross roads safely on their way to and from school. These patrols can operate between 8:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., and patrol staff are trained and authorised to stop traffic to ensure children's safety	Discretionary	Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984
Provide and Administer Education Maintenance Allowance	Councils must administer EMA on behalf of Scottish Government. They manage the application process, assess eligibility based on household income, and ensure payments are made correctly. Councils must also make sure that young people sign a Learning Agreement, which sets out expectations for attendance, behaviour, and progress. Payments are only made if these conditions are met. Councils also handle appeals, monitor compliance, and protect personal information throughout the process.	Statutory	Education Maintenance Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Carry Out Relevant Consultation on School Changes	Councils must carry out consultation in relation to certain actions such as permanently closing a school; discontinuing all nursery classes or a stage of education in a school; permanent discontinuation of Gaelic medium education in a stage of education at a school that also provides that stage of education through English medium education and vice versa; establishing a new school; relocating a school or nursery class; variation of admission arrangements for a school etc.	Statutory	Schools (Consultation) Act 2010
Provide support for Parent Councils	Councils are required to give advice and information reasonably requested by a Parent Council for a school in its area. They must take appropriate steps to ensure that head teachers and staff at the schools are available to give advice and information to a Parent Council. They must determine an allocation of money within the budget to allow a Parent Council to meet its administration expenses, training expenses etc. Councils must publish an annual strategy for parental involvement, and an annual report on the activities undertaken in pursuance of the general policies set out in the strategy for parental involvement. In preparing the strategy for parental involvement, councils must have regard to how that strategy will promote equal opportunities and the complaints procedure must also be set out in the document.	Statutory	Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006
Provide information to Skills Development Scotland for post-school planning	Councils and schools must share key information with Skills Development Scotland, the national careers service. This helps SDS support young people as they prepare to leave school and move on to college, university, training, or work. The information might include things like pupils' learning needs, career interests, or support plans. By sharing this early, SDS can offer tailored advice and help make sure every young person has a clear path and the right support for life after school.	Statutory	Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
Comply with PVG Scheme requirements and issue badges for vetted school transport staff	Councils must ensure that all school transport drivers and escorts who work directly with children are members of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme. This is a legal requirement for anyone doing regulated work with children, such as supervising or transporting them to and from school. Councils are responsible for processing PVG applications or confirming membership, and for issuing ID badges once checks are complete. These badges help identify approved staff and ensure children are transported safely by vetted individuals. From April 2025, PVG membership will be mandatory by law for all such roles	Statutory	Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Ensure Accessibility in Education	Councils must prepare an accessibility strategy for pupils with disabilities in relation to any school for which it is responsible, ensuring adequate resources for implementing the strategy. Councils must consult with such children, parents and young persons as it thinks fit and have regard to any guidance issued by the Scottish Ministers.	Statutory	Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
Provide education for children unable to attend school due to illness or other reasons	If a child can't go to school—because of illness, mental health issues, or other serious circumstances—the council still has a responsibility to make sure they get an education. This might mean arranging home teaching, online learning, or support in a hospital setting. The goal is to help the child keep learning and stay connected to school, even if they can't be there in person. Councils must work with families and schools to make sure the education provided meets the child's needs and helps them return to school when they're ready.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Process and Issue Child Work Permits	Councils must process and issue child work permits to make sure that any child under school-leaving age who wants to work has permission to do so safely and legally. This involves checking that the job is suitable, won't interfere with the child's education, and meets health and safety rules. Councils also make sure the employer follows the law on working hours and conditions for young people. Once everything is approved, the council issues a permit that allows the child to work.	Statutory	Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
Process and Issue licences for Child Performance Licence/ Body of Persons Approval	Councils must process and issue child performance licences to make sure children under school-leaving age can take part in performances, modelling, or sporting activities safely and legally. This includes checking that the activity won't harm the child's health, wellbeing, or education. Councils also assess applications for Body of Persons Approval (BOPA), which allows groups to perform without needing individual licences for each child, as long as no child is paid and no school time is missed. These responsibilities are set out in Scottish law, and councils must follow strict rules to protect children involved in public performances.	Statutory	Children and Young Persons Act 1963 Children and Young Person's Act 1933 Children (Performances and Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2014

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide Administration for all Education Off-Site Visits	Councils must ensure the effective administration of all education off-site visits. This includes planning and approving trips, assessing risks, securing appropriate insurance, and ensuring that all necessary permissions and safeguarding measures are in place. Councils must also provide clear guidance to schools and staff, maintain accurate records, and ensure that all visits support educational outcomes while prioritising the health, safety, and wellbeing of all participants.	Discretionary	Health and Safety at Work, etc, Act 1974
Administer the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme	Councils must manage the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme by registering eligible childcare settings, providing upfront funding, and supporting them to deliver daily portions of milk (or approved alternatives) and healthy snacks to pre-school children. This includes keeping track of which settings are participating, processing payments, and ensuring records like orders and receipts are kept for monitoring purposes. While settings don't need to submit receipts regularly, they must retain them in case they're selected for review. Councils must ensure the food and drink provided in schools meets strict nutritional standards. Meals should include plenty of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, and healthy proteins, while limiting things like sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. Schools must follow these rules whether they're serving breakfast, lunch, snacks, or drinks.	Statutory	Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme (Scotland) Regulations 2021
Promote and facilitate access to medical and dental treatment for children and young people	Councils must support children and young people in accessing medical and dental care. This means they should make practical arrangements to encourage and assist young people in using these health services—unless a parent or guardian has clearly stated they do not give consent. The aim is to ensure children's health needs are met as part of their overall wellbeing and care.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Provide health inspection and treatment facilities for pupils	Councils must ensure that children and young people—especially those in schools—have access to proper medical and dental care. This includes making sure there are enough suitable facilities for routine health inspections, ongoing supervision, and treatment when needed.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Authorise Medical Examinations for Pupil Cleanliness	Local authorities must promote personal hygiene among pupils and may authorise a medical officer to carry out cleanliness checks when necessary. This can include examination of the pupil and their clothing. Such checks must always be conducted with sensitivity and respect. In particular, if a girl is being examined, the assessment must be carried out by a female or a qualified male doctor to ensure appropriate care and safeguarding.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Promote mental health and wellbeing in schools	Councils must help schools create a positive environment that supports the mental health and wellbeing of all pupils. This includes encouraging healthy relationships, emotional resilience, and access to support when needed. Schools may offer wellbeing activities, counselling services, and work with health professionals to support children and young people. The aim is to help pupils feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.	Discretionary	Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007
Support safeguarding and child protection policies in schools	Councils must make sure schools follow strong safeguarding and child protection policies to keep children safe from harm. This includes having clear procedures for reporting concerns, training staff to recognise signs of abuse or neglect, and working with other services like social work and health. Schools must create a safe environment where children feel protected and supported, and councils oversee this to make sure legal duties are met.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide Digital learning and ICT	Councils are expected to support schools in using digital technology to improve learning and teaching. This includes making sure pupils and teachers have access to devices, internet, and digital tools that help with education. Councils also help train staff to use technology confidently and safely, and work with schools to include digital learning in everyday lessons.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Support Transitions Between Education Stages	Schools and councils must help children and young people move smoothly from one stage of education to the next—like starting nursery, moving from primary to secondary school, or leaving school for college, training, or work. This means making sure pupils are prepared, supported, and confident about the change. It can include sharing information between schools, involving families, and offering guidance or extra help if needed. The aim is to make these transitions as positive and successful as possible for every learner.	Discretionary	Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
Raise standards and monitor performance	Councils must regularly check how well schools are doing and work to make education better for all pupils. This means setting clear goals, collecting information about how schools are performing, and taking action to improve teaching and learning where needed. Councils also report on progress so that parents, staff, and the wider community can see how schools are improving over time.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide and maintain religious education and observance	Councils must ensure that all schools provide religious education and observance as part of the curriculum. This helps pupils understand different beliefs and values and offers inclusive opportunities for spiritual development and celebrating shared values. These activities should be respectful of Scotland's diverse communities and inclusive of all faiths and none. Councils must also ensure that parents are informed of their legal right to withdraw their children from religious observance without any disadvantage to their education. Parents must be informed of their legal right to withdraw their children from religious observance without any disadvantage to their education. Councils are also required to maintain religious observance or instruction in schools unless the local community formally decides otherwise through a democratic process.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide instrumental music tuition	Councils must ensure that instrumental music tuition is available to pupils as part of a broad and balanced education. Following Scottish Government policy, tuition should be provided free of charge, removing financial barriers for families and supporting equal access for all. Councils are expected to use allocated funding to maintain and enhance music services, including hiring instructors and purchasing instruments. The aim is to support pupils' creativity, confidence, and wellbeing, while recognising the important role music plays in education and community life.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Maintain and manage school buildings	Councils must ensure that school buildings are safe, clean, and fit for learning. This includes regular maintenance, repairs, and upgrades to meet health and safety standards, support accessibility, and provide a positive environment for pupils and staff. Councils are also responsible for managing school facilities efficiently, planning for future needs, and ensuring buildings meet environmental and energy efficiency goals. Good management of school buildings helps support high-quality education and wellbeing across the school community.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide support to looked after children	Councils must provide extra support to children and young people who are looked after—meaning they are in the care of the local authority, such as in foster care, residential care, or living at home under supervision. This includes making sure they are safe, supported, and have access to education, health services, and opportunities to thrive. Councils act as corporate parents, meaning they have a legal and moral duty to care for these children as any good parent would—listening to their needs, helping them succeed, and ensuring they are treated with love, respect, and fairness.	Statutory	Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Promote participation and pupil voice	Councils must support schools in giving children and young people meaningful opportunities to share their views and influence decisions that affect their education and school life. This includes encouraging pupil councils, learner-led groups, and involvement in planning, learning, and school improvement. Participation should be inclusive, respectful, and lead to real change. It's not just about listening—it's about acting on what pupils say.	Discretionary	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
Provide education in secure accommodation	Councils must ensure that children and young people placed in secure accommodation receive a high-quality education that meets their individual needs. Secure accommodation is used for children who are at serious risk of harming themselves or others and need intensive support in a safe, locked environment. Education in these settings must be trauma-informed, inclusive, and designed to help young people re-engage with learning and prepare for life beyond care.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide Support to Home Education	Councils must support families who choose to educate their children at home by providing clear information, fair processes, and respectful communication. Home education is a legal and valid choice, and parents are responsible for ensuring their child receives an efficient and suitable education. Councils must respond to requests to withdraw a child from school in a timely and consistent way, and they should work in partnership with families to promote the child's wellbeing and educational development. Children also have the right to express their views about their education, and these views should be considered in line with their age and maturity.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Consider and determine school placing requests	Councils must consider and decide on requests from parents or guardians who want their child to attend a particular school. This duty ensures that every placing request is reviewed fairly, taking into account the child's needs, the availability of places, and the school's capacity, so that families have the opportunity to choose a suitable school whenever possible. They must also review applications from parents who want their child to attend a school outside their designated catchment area. This involves checking eligibility, applying statutory criteria, and making decisions fairly and consistently. Councils must also handle appeals and ensure the process complies with education law to protect parental choice and maintain transparency.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide free home-to-school transport for eligible pupils	Councils are responsible for arranging free transport for pupils who qualify, such as those living beyond a set distance from school or with additional support needs. This duty ensures that all children can access education safely and without cost barriers, often involving contracts with transport providers and compliance with safety standards.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Maintain accurate and secure education records for children and young people in schools	Councils must keep detailed records on pupils, including personal details, attendance, attainment, and support needs. These records must be accurate, regularly updated, and stored securely to comply with data protection laws. Proper record-keeping supports effective education planning, safeguarding, and reporting to national bodies.	Statutory	Pupils' Educational Records (Scotland) Regulations 2003
Collect and report data on pupils and school workforce	Councils gather and analyse data on pupil numbers, demographics, attainment, and staffing levels. This information is reported to the Scottish Government and other agencies to monitor performance, allocate funding, and plan future services. Accurate data collection is essential for accountability and improving education outcomes.	Statutory	School Pupil Records (Scotland) Regulations 1990 Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide facilities for social, cultural, recreational and physical education	Councils must make sure that pupils in their schools have access to suitable facilities for social, cultural and recreational activities, as well as for physical education and training. This means providing or securing places, equipment and opportunities that support pupils' wider development beyond classroom learning. The aim of the duty is to ensure children and young people can take part in a broad range of activities that contribute to their wellbeing, confidence and physical health.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Determine required school accommodation for the area	Councils must decide how much public school accommodation is needed in their area, and when doing so they must consider all schools in the area, including private and independent schools. This ensures that decisions about building, expanding or reorganising schools are based on the total education provision available, not just council-run schools. The aim is to make sure there are enough suitable places for children, without unnecessary duplication or gaps in provision.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Manage Denominational Schools and Religious Instruction	Councils must manage denominational schools. This includes appointing, without remuneration, a supervisor of religious instruction for each denominational school. The council must also provide appropriate facilities within the school for the holding of religious examinations. These duties safeguard the rights of denominational schools to deliver religious education in line with their faith traditions, while ensuring compliance with national legislation and maintaining educational standards.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Seek Consent for Certain Proposals on Denominational Schools	Councils must submit specific proposals concerning denominational schools to the Secretary of State for approval before implementation. These proposals typically relate to significant changes such as alterations to school governance, accommodation, or arrangements that could affect the character or provision of denominational education. This requirement ensures that denominational rights are protected and that any changes comply with statutory safeguards for faith-based schooling.	Statutory	Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
Provide Essential Educational Materials	Councils must supply pupils with the necessary resources to fully benefit from the education provided. This includes books, writing materials, stationery, mathematical instruments, practice materials, and any other articles required for effective learning. By ensuring these materials are available, the council supports equal access to education and removes barriers that could hinder a pupil's ability to participate fully in the curriculum.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Improve Road and Entrance Safety for Pupils	Councils may take measures to reduce the risk of accidents for pupils travelling to or from schools or other educational establishments under its management. This includes carrying out works to improve the safety of any private road used by pupils or located near such establishments. Additionally, the council may provide or arrange for the provision of safety barriers at or near school entrances. These actions aim to safeguard pupils during their journeys and while on school premises, ensuring a safe learning environment.	Discretionary	Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
Maintain Safe and Compliant Premises and Equipment	Councils must ensure that the premises and equipment of all educational establishments under its management meet the standards and requirements applicable to those establishments. This includes maintaining buildings, classrooms, and facilities in a condition that promotes good health and safety for all pupils, staff, and visitors. Equipment used for teaching and learning must also be kept in safe working order.	Statutory	Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 Fire (Scotland) Act 2005
Acquire Land and Develop Educational Premises	Councils may acquire land—whether within or outside their area—by purchase, lease, excambion (exchange), or donation. They are also empowered to erect and furnish buildings or carry out other works on land they own or lease. This provision ensures councils have the flexibility to secure suitable sites and facilities for educational purposes, supporting the development and maintenance of schools and other education establishments.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide Education and Support for Pupils from Other Authorities	Councils can provide, in or in connection with any public school or other educational establishment under its management, school education, further education, and other services. This includes offering additional support for pupils who belong to the area of another Scottish education authority or a local authority in England or Wales. This duty ensures flexibility and inclusivity, allowing councils to meet the needs of pupils from outside their own area.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Serve a notice requiring explanation of absence	If a child is enrolled in a public school but is not attending regularly, and the council believes the parent has no good reason, the council must send the parent a formal notice. This notice asks the parent to explain why the child has been missing school. If the explanation is not satisfactory, the council can take further steps, such as issuing an Attendance Order or starting legal action.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Require information and make an Attendance Order	If a child of school age is not attending any local public school and the council thinks the parent is not providing proper education at home, the council must send a notice asking the parent to give details of the child's education, either in writing or in person. If the parent cannot show that suitable education is being provided, the council must issue an Attendance Order, which legally requires the child to attend a named school.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Safeguard and promote the welfare of children in residential accommodation for school attendance	If a child or young person is provided with residential accommodation so they can attend school, the council (education authority) must make sure the child's welfare is protected and promoted. This means ensuring the accommodation is safe, suitable, and supports the child's well-being while they are living there for educational purposes.	Statutory	Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Provide suitable clothing for pupils	If a council learns that a pupil cannot fully benefit from education because their clothing is inadequate or unsuitable, the council must take action. This means providing the necessary clothing to ensure the pupil is properly and suitably dressed so they can participate fully in school life. They can also ensure pupils have the right clothing for physical exercise or any school activity where special clothing is needed.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Education (Scotland) Act 2016
Provide facilities for food and drink at school	The council must make sure there are facilities at school for pupils to eat or drink food they bring from home. In addition, the authority may choose to provide food and drink at the school itself. This ensures pupils have a suitable place to consume meals and promotes their health and well-being during the school day.	Statutory	Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Grant exemptions from school attendance in cases of exceptional hardship	Councils can allow a child over the age of 14 to be exempt from attending school if there are circumstances at home that would make attendance cause exceptional hardship. This means the council must consider the family's situation carefully and, if satisfied, grant an exemption from the usual requirement to attend school.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide and manage recreational and educational facilities	Councils can establish, maintain, and manage facilities that support recreation, physical activity, and learning outside the classroom. This includes camps, outdoor centres, playing fields, swimming pools, play areas, sports halls, youth and community centres, cultural centres, and clubs. They should also organise holiday classes, games, expeditions, and other activities to promote health, wellbeing, and personal development for children and young people.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Provide education without undue delay for excluded or withdrawn pupils	Councils can establish, maintain, and manage facilities that support recreation, physical activity, and learning outside the classroom. This includes camps, outdoor centres, playing fields, swimming pools, play areas, sports halls, youth and community centres, cultural centres, and clubs. They should also organise holiday classes, games, expeditions, and other activities to promote health, wellbeing, and personal development for children and young people.	Discretionary	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Provide necessary educational materials	The council must make sure pupils have all the basic items they need to learn effectively. This includes things like books, writing tools, stationery, math instruments, and practice materials. The goal is to remove barriers so every child can fully benefit from the education offered, without families having to supply these essentials themselves.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Monitor and improve the quality of school education	Councils must actively work to raise the standard of education across all schools they manage. This means setting clear expectations for improvement and ensuring every school has a development plan that focuses on enhancing teaching, learning, and overall outcomes for pupils. Councils should regularly review the performance of each school, using evidence such as inspection reports, attainment data, and feedback from parents and pupils. If a school is found to be underperforming or not meeting required standards, the council has a responsibility to take prompt and effective action.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
Prepare and publish an annual plan and report for education	Councils must publish an annual plan that sets out what the education service aims to achieve over the year and then reporting on progress. The plan should outline priorities, actions, and resources to improve learning and outcomes for children and young people. The annual report shows how well these goals were met, highlights successes, and identifies areas for improvement. This ensures transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in education services.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
Define standards of performance and review schools	Defining standards of performance and reviewing schools means setting clear expectations for what good education looks like and checking how well schools meet those expectations. Standards cover areas like teaching quality, pupil achievement, and school leadership. Reviewing schools involves monitoring progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and supporting improvement. This helps ensure all learners receive a high-quality education and that schools are accountable for their performance.	Statutory	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

Duty/Power	Simple terms explainer	Legal status	Determining legislation
Delegate preparation of school improvement plans to headteachers	Delegating the preparation of school improvement plans to headteachers means giving headteachers the responsibility to create a plan that sets out how their school will improve learning and performance. The plan should include priorities, actions, and targets based on the school's needs. While the local authority provides guidance and oversight, headteachers lead the process because they know their school best. This approach supports accountability and ensures improvement plans are tailored to each school.	Discretionary	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
Implement emergency education regulations	Councils must have regard to advice from the Chief Medical Officer (or a person designated by Scottish Ministers) and any guidance issued by Ministers about protecting public health and ensuring continuity of education. During emergencies, Scottish Ministers can make regulations requiring councils to take specific actions—such as keeping schools open or closed, adjusting attendance, using premises for health purposes, or providing additional education services. Councils must comply with these regulations even if they temporarily override other statutory duties or timelines.	Statutory	Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008 Civil Contingencies Act 2004
Provide free access to period products for pupils and students	Councils must ensure that period products are available free of charge to anyone who needs them and is either a pupil at a school managed by the council or a student at a further or higher education institution it manages. The council must provide or arrange provision of products in specified locations within each building normally used by pupils or students—at least one location per building unless, after consultation, the council considers a building unsuitable. The products must be sufficient to meet needs during term time.	Statutory	Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021
Prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation in schools	Councils must ensure pupils and applicants for admission are treated fairly and not discriminated against because of a protected characteristic—disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. This duty applies to admissions, terms of admission, provision of education, access to benefits and services, exclusions, and any other detriment. Councils must also prevent harassment and victimisation in all these areas.	Statutory	Equality Act 2010

Appendix 2. Policy Context relating to Children and Families

Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)	Scotland's overarching national framework ensuring coordinated support for every child's wellbeing, so that all children and young people get the right help at the right time to reach their full potential. GIRFEC introduces common tools (like the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators) and practices for all services working with children. It emphasizes early intervention, a "named person" approach for a single point of contact, and child-centered planning (child's plan) across education, health, and social care.	Initially launched 2006; Policy refreshed with updated guidance in 2022-2023 (new GIRFEC practice guidance and resources). Ongoing national policy.	Scottish Government GIRFEC Policy Page
UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act 2024	A landmark legislation to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law to the maximum extent of devolved powers. It makes children's rights legally enforceable: public authorities must not act incompatibly with UNCRC requirements, and it gives children and their representatives the ability to challenge rights breaches in court. The Act also requires Scottish Ministers to create a Children's Rights Scheme and conduct Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA) on new laws and decisions.	Legislation came into effect in July 2024 placing proactive duties on local authorities to uphold children's rights.	Children's Rights Policy (Scottish Govt.)
Funded Early Learning & Childcare (1140 Hours)	A universal childcare policy providing free high-quality early learning and childcare to all 3- and 4-year-olds (and eligible 2-year-olds) for 1,140 hours per year. This roughly equals 30 hours per week in term-time, aiming to give children the best start and to support working parents. Funded ELC is delivered via a partnership of local authorities and providers to meet national quality standards.	Enshrined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, with phased expansion completed by August 2021 (1140 hours entitlement fully in effect from 2021).	Scottish Govt. Early Education and Care Policy
"Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare Plan (2022–2026)"	A multi-year national plan to further develop early years and childcare services. The plan focuses on expanding access (including developing school-age childcare), improving quality, and closing gaps in uptake. Key initiatives include supporting councils to deliver 1140 hours, increasing eligible 2-year-old uptake, maintaining the national quality standard, growing the early years workforce, and promoting outdoor play. This strategy builds on the expansion achieved in 2021 and sets out actions through 2026.	Published October 2022, covering actions for 2022–2026. Currently being implemented.	Scottish Govt. Early Education and Care – Priority Actions

Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
Scottish Attainment Challenge (Education Attainment)	An education initiative aiming to close the poverty-related attainment gap and ensure equity and excellence in Scottish education. Through the Attainment Challenge, the government provides significant funding (≈£1 billion over 2021–2026) to support schools and local authorities in raising the educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Key elements include Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) directly to schools, Strategic Equity Funding to local authorities, support for care-experienced young people, and various national programs and mentoring schemes.	Launched in 2015; renewed and extended for 2022–2026 with increased funding and a refreshed framework. Current phase covers school years up to 2025–26.	Scottish Govt. “Pupil Attainment: Closing the Gap” Policy
Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)	Scotland’s national curriculum for ages 3–18, designed to provide a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum from early years through secondary education. CfE focuses on developing four capacities in every child – successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen, effective contributor – and emphasizes a broad, skills-based education. It replaced earlier curricula with new qualifications and approaches to interdisciplinary learning, personal achievement, and competence across literacy, numeracy, and health & wellbeing.	Phased introduction from 2010 (following a reform process begun in 2003). Ongoing; subject to continuous review and refinement. (An OECD review in 2021 led to further planned reforms in assessment and qualifications, currently in development.)	Scottish Govt. Schools Policy (overview of curriculum goals)
Additional Support for Learning (ASL) & Inclusive Education	A policy and legal framework ensuring support for children with additional support needs (ASN) so they can access and benefit from education. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, local authorities must identify and address barriers to learning – including disabilities, learning difficulties, or circumstances affecting learning. The policy promotes inclusive education, multi-agency support plans (Co-ordinated Support Plans), and the presumption of mainstream schooling for pupils with ASN.	In force since 2005 (2004 Act implementation); amended in 2009 and accompanied by regularly updated statutory guidance (most recently updated code of practice in 2017). Currently active policy for inclusive education.	Scottish Govt. Schools Policy – ASN Support (ASL legislation: 2004 Act, as amended)
National Child Protection Guidance (Scotland)	A comprehensive national guidance for child protection applicable across all agencies (social services, health, education, police, etc.). It sets out roles, responsibilities, and processes for protecting children from abuse and neglect, emphasizing inter-agency cooperation. The guidance supports the consistent implementation of robust child protection procedures and early intervention to keep children safe from harm.	Latest edition published September 2021, with an updated version in 2023. The 2021 guidance replaces earlier 2014 guidance, reflecting changes in law, practice, and findings from child protection reviews, and was updated in 2023 to incorporate new evidence and policy developments.	Scottish Govt. Child Protection Policy Page (National Guidance 2021; updated 2023)

Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019	A legal reform that bans all physical punishment of children. This Act abolished the archaic defense of “reasonable chastisement,” so that children now have the same legal protection from assault as adults. From November 2020 onward, any form of physical punishment or smacking of a child is unlawful in Scotland. Scotland was the first UK nation to implement this full ban on corporal punishment of children.	Passed in October 2019, took effect on 7 November 2020. Currently in force.	Scottish Govt. Child Protection Policy – Equal Protection Act
The Promise (Independent Care Review & Follow-Up)	“The Promise” refers to the national pledge to transform Scotland’s care system in line with recommendations of the Independent Care Review. Accepted in 2020, The Promise calls for sweeping changes so that children and young people in care grow up loved, safe, and respected. It encompasses improving foster and kinship care, supporting families to stay together, enhancing care leavers’ support, and shifting towards “whole family” early intervention to prevent family breakdown. The Scottish Government published a Promise Implementation Plan in 2022 and is actively monitoring progress (with reports in 2024) to achieve these changes by 2030.	The Independent Care Review concluded in February 2020, and The Promise blueprint was published in 2020. The Promise Implementation Plan was released in March 2022, with actions to be delivered by 2030. Progress updates are published regularly (e.g., Sept 2024 update) as the policy is currently being implemented.	“Keeping The Promise” Progress Update (2024); Scottish Govt. Family Support Routemap
Youth Justice Vision & Whole System Approach	A rights-respecting youth justice strategy focused on preventing offending by young people and supporting those who do offend. The Scottish Government’s vision (articulated in “Justice for Children and Young People – A Rights-Respecting Approach”, 2021) prioritizes early intervention, addressing root causes of offending (such as adversity or unmet needs), and diverting youths from the criminal justice system. The longstanding Whole System Approach (WSA) brings together all agencies (police, social work, education, courts) to ensure young people receive tailored interventions and, where possible, are dealt with through the Children’s Hearings System rather than adult courts. The strategy also includes expanding diversion programs, improving community alternatives to custody, and supporting rehabilitation.	Current Youth Justice Vision and Priorities published June 2021 (replacing the 2015–2020 strategy). The WSA was introduced in 2011 and remains a core policy, reinforced by the 2021 vision. Ongoing implementation, with an action plan currently in progress (2021–2024).	Scottish Govt. Youth Justice Policy Page

Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
Equally Safe – Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls	Equally Safe is Scotland’s national strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. It covers domestic abuse, sexual violence, commercial sexual exploitation, harassment, and harmful practices like FGM and forced marriage. The strategy takes a gendered approach, recognizing these forms of violence are rooted in gender inequality. It sets out measures for prevention (shifting attitudes and norms), early intervention, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators to account. Equally Safe is delivered via multi-agency partnerships and includes a rolling delivery plan and significant funding for frontline support services.	Originally launched in 2014; refreshed strategy published in December 2023 to incorporate new priorities and build on progress. The Equally Safe 2023– strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan are currently being implemented.	Scottish Govt. VAWG Policy – Equally Safe Strategy



Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
Maternal & Child Health – “The Best Start” and Related Initiatives	A collection of health policies focusing on maternal health, infant wellbeing, and child health services, to ensure every child in Scotland has the best start in life. Key elements include: • The Best Start (2017) – A five-year plan for maternity and neonatal care modernization, implementing recommendations to improve maternity care, neonatal facilities, perinatal mental health support, and continuity of carer. • Universal Health Visiting Service – Expansion of health visitor programs to provide consistent home visits and child health reviews for all families with young children, ensuring early identification of needs and support (expanded visiting schedule implemented by 2018). • Family Nurse Partnership – A program providing intensive, nurse-led home visiting support for first-time young mothers (up to age 24) from pregnancy until the child is 2 years old, to improve maternal and child outcomes. • Free Vitamins & Nutrition Schemes – Free vitamins for all pregnant women (to promote maternal and fetal health) and the Best Start Foods programme (preloaded card to help low-income families purchase healthy foods). • Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme – Provides funding for milk and healthy snacks (fruit, veg) for young children in eligible early learning and childcare settings, to support nutrition. • Free School Meals (P1–P5) – All children in primary years 1 to 5 in state schools are entitled to a free school lunch during term time, to support nutrition and ease cost of living for families (policy in effect nationwide by August 2022). • Childhood Immunisations and Health – A robust vaccination programme (per Scotland’s Vaccination Transformation Programme) to protect children from diseases, and ongoing initiatives in child dental health and healthy weight (e.g. Child Healthy Weight programs).	Various introduction dates; “The Best Start” plan launched January 2017, with implementation ongoing through 2022. Free universal infant nutrition and health visiting expansions were rolled out between 2017 and 2020. These measures are all currently in effect (some expanded in recent years, e.g., free school meals to P5 in 2022, with plans to extend to P6–P7 in future).	Scottish Govt. Maternal & Child Health Policy

Policy	Purpose & Scope	Introduced/Last updated	Official reference
“Holistic Whole Family Support” (National Principles & Routemap)	A strategy to reform and improve family support services across Scotland, ensuring families get the right support at the right time to prevent crises. It establishes national principles of holistic, whole-family support – meaning coordinated, multi-agency support that is preventative, accessible, child-focused, and responsive to family needs. This routemap aligns with GIRFEC and The Promise, aiming to reduce the need for children to go into care by supporting families early. It calls for consistent practice standards across Scotland and a shift to stigma-free, needs-based services for families, with strong leadership and investment at local and national levels.	Published as a Scottish Government strategy in July 2022. Implementation is underway, supported by the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) – a £500 million fund (2021–2026) to build capacity for community-based family support services.	Scottish Govt. “Holistic Whole Family Support” Strategy (2022)



Appendix 3. Examples of Public Service Reform in Action

Example 1: Fairer Futures Partnerships

Fairer Futures Partnerships (FFPs) were established as locally driven, place-based, targeted tests of change designed to tackle child poverty by testing new approaches, learning what works, and spreading effective practice nationally.

They sit within the broader ambition of public service reform, focusing on prevention, whole-family support, and system change. FFPs are increasingly described as how public service reform is delivered in practice, rather than simply projects tackling child poverty.

There are 16 FFPs across Scotland, each taking different approaches depending on local priorities and context. Some are focused on system change, others on service-level tests of change, and many do a mixture of both.

What's working well

1. Leadership, Governance & Culture

- Strong leadership buy-in, willingness to adopt new leadership styles and share responsibility.
- Clear, streamlined governance structures support alignment and momentum.
- Political support helps build legitimacy and sustain long-term work.

2. Data-led, evidence-driven approaches

- Using data to target activity more precisely (e.g., Glasgow, Dundee City, North Ayrshire).

3. Lived Experience & Community Voices

- Meaningful power-sharing with service users and communities in service design.
- Peer-led models and community co-design groups improve relevance and trust.

4. Partnership & Collaboration

- Strong third sector-sector involvement improves trust and reach.
- Cross-service collaboration (housing, employability, childcare, NHS, schools) enhances impact.
- Recalibration of the relationship between local government and third sector in terms of delivering services.

5. Workforce Support

- Trauma-informed practice and values-based leadership training build resilience and empathy.
- Flexibility enables more holistic, whole-family support.

6. Communication & Engagement

- Targeted outreach (uniform banks, community sessions, locality-specific resources).
- Strength-based framing helps shift narratives around poverty.

7. Systematic Learning

- Peer support, learning partners (CELCIS, New Local) and building in dedicated time and methods for learning across this work.

The Fairer Futures Partnerships have demonstrated that within the children and families' space there is a willingness to work differently and it can be done. Challenges and barriers continue to exist and the evidence from the pilots align with the points within section 3 on the complex policy landscape and workforce capacity.

Example Case Study: [Glasgow - Public Service Reform in Action_v1_130126.docx](#)

Ingredients for success for Glasgow Child Poverty Programme (which began as Fairer Futures Partnership pilot):

- Willingness of Scottish Government to work differently with local government
- Local political and officer leadership appetite to do things differently and giving

permission to do things differently in the short and long term

- Sustained investment in change capacity, rather than adding systems change on to people's day jobs
- Engaging with different kinds of data and intelligence to develop a more robust understanding of the system and how to be precise with where to disrupt
- Seizing opportunities when they arise
- Attempting different ways of multi-agency working and collaboration, accepting this will be challenging and time consuming
- Drawing on multiple kinds of expertise
- A willingness to be uncomfortable, to not have the answers and to take learning from "missteps"

Challenges and barriers for Glasgow's reform work:

- Precarity of slipping into ways of working that support the "as is" system
- Simplifying the complexity of this work for multiple audiences, communicating learning, and articulating the work as systems change/ reform work rather than as a short-term intervention or project
- Evidencing progress and impact of work that does not fit neatly into short-term funding or political cycles
- Developing a clarity of vision and ambition
- Balancing innovation, flexibility and collaboration with governance, accountability, funding and programme management

Example 2: Clackmannanshire's Transformation Space

The Clackmannanshire Transformation Space is a pioneering, community-led model of public service reform designed to shift power, resources, and decision-making towards local people. Emerging from the Family Wellbeing Partnership, it brings together public, private, and philanthropic funding under a single structure, enabling more preventative, relational and outcomes-focused approaches. It is recognised as a promising example of community-led system reform, offering valuable insights for public service redesign across Scotland.

Purpose and Approach

The Transformation Space was created to challenge siloed systems, simplify complex funding arrangements, and ensure that local voices shape how money is invested. A Community Voice Panel—over 50 residents with diverse lived experiences—plays a central role in setting priorities, assessing proposals, and advising on system change.

An Oversight Board, including elected members and community representatives, provides assurance and ratifies funding decisions. Foundation Scotland acts as an independent fund manager, while external learning partners assess progress and help shape a learning-led model of reform.

Early Activity and Impact

Two initial funding areas were launched:

- Homelessness prevention (£200,000)
- Youth mental health (£25,000)

Panels co-developed local visions, issued calls for proposals, and began influencing wider council decisions, including transport redesign and youth wellbeing support. The initiative has received extensive positive media coverage, strengthening local confidence.

Data from the wider Family Wellbeing Partnership reinforces the value of this approach—showing reductions in child protection interventions, stronger early help pathways, and improved youth outcomes.

What Is Enabling Success

Success so far is driven by:

- Strong leadership and political backing
- A clear shared vision
- Independent philanthropic partnership
- Values-based collaboration across services
- Skilled facilitation and plain-language processes
- A culture that centres lived experience

Challenges

Key challenges include balancing pace with governance requirements, communicating a complex new model, shifting practitioner culture, attracting new funders, and maintaining community confidence. These are being addressed through clear governance, ongoing engagement, and a phased learning-first approach.

Next Steps

The next phase will deepen co-design with communities, expand the learning framework, attract further investment, and scale the model. Senior leaders will remain closely involved to ensure full system integration.

Example 3: Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability (SAVVI)

SAVVI, which stands for Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability, is a national initiative designed to help councils and their partners to proactively identify and support vulnerable people before they reach crisis point – before they face eviction or bankruptcy, before they are forced to rely on food banks, and before stress and impossible choices take a toll on their mental or physical health. By intervening earlier, we can not only prevent unnecessary hardship but also help councils use resources more efficiently, delivering support where and when it's needed most.

SAVVI is a way of working – an approach – underpinned by tools, templates, and standards. The process begins with defining the purpose and remit of the work, followed by identifying those at risk through legal and ethical data-driven rules. It then moves to assessing needs, offering or signposting support, reporting outcomes, and improving the process over time. This cycle ensures transparency and continuous learning.

SAVVI addresses long-standing barriers such as legal uncertainty around data sharing and fragmented data held by multiple agencies (e.g., councils, DWP, HMRC, Social Security Scotland). By creating clear standards and processes, SAVVI helps organisations “connect the dots” and build a full picture of vulnerability at a person or household level. Ultimately, SAVVI aims to enable earlier, smarter interventions that make a real difference in people's lives.

As a result of Scottish Government Funding, SAVVI is now supported by a dedicated SAVVI team in Scotland. As well as providing ongoing advice and support to local government in Scotland, the SAVVI team is progressing work on two pilot projects.

Pilot 1: Rural Child Poverty

The first Scottish pilot is focused on income maximization as a way to tackle child poverty in rural areas, where identifying families before crisis proved particularly challenging at a data zone level. The pilot established consensus on risk factors, but progress was slowed by uncertainty around legal gateways. That work is ongoing and is currently exploring new legal gateways through which Scottish local authorities can receive more comprehensive DWP data on Universal Credit.

The case study is available here: [How SAVVI is Tackling Rural Child Poverty in Scotland](#)
| iStand UK

Pilot 2:

Pilot 2 will run alongside the existing Pilot (and indeed, there may be cross-over between the two). The nature of the vulnerability and harm that will be addressed in the new project are yet to be decided. As we are seeking alignment with current national priorities, we hope the pilot will impact - either directly or indirectly - on child/family poverty, complementing UNCRC, Fairer Future Partnerships, or Whole Family Support initiatives.

Example 4: Capacity building within the local government workforce

Councils can unlock community action by supporting volunteering, asset transfer and local initiatives and by acting as connectors and facilitators rather than gatekeepers.

Councils are in a unique position to act as connectors for communities and services, however just as 'community' is not one thing, neither are 'councils' and there is a need for joined-up leadership, different models of thinking and new models of connection and engagement.

There is an opportunity for Community Learning and Development teams to 'sharpen their business case', using social value to better tell their story and encourage others to understand and buy into their worth. The recent publication of the Still report on the independent review of Community Learning and Development "Learning: For All. For Life", noted that the review covered the learning aspect of community learning and development and not the development one, which represented a missed opportunity (the "silent D" in community learning and development). Supporting community activism and volunteering is a skilled job that delivers clear outcomes for communities.

However, there is a need for the whole local government workforce to understand that community connections, trust, reputation and service delivery are everyone's responsibility. By sharing information, insights, lived experience and capitalising on connections and relationships already in place, there is significant opportunity to unlock engagement and capacity within our existing workforce – this is everyone's responsibility, not just community learning and development.

Sir Harry Burns, retired Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, has spoken for many years on the power of empowering frontline staff to fix the problems of local people that they meet every day. There is a circular link here in terms of the benefits of a boost to trust and reputation, which we've seen are so fundamental to participation and engagement.

The revised model of the 21st Century Public Servant highlights key skills relevant for the future. These include the importance of thinking 'whole system'; curating relationships; being able to communicate in different ways depending on the audience; being a 'frugal innovator' able to weave together resources from "threadbare public services". Equally, the 21st Century Councillor must be skilled in shifting perspective between the council and community; putting residents at the heart of decision-making; building effective partner relationships and acting as a 'hybrid connector' to build local relationships.

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