

How can adopting a trauma-informed approach help drive forward improved outcomes as part of Scotland's roadmap for COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation?

Learning Report: Housing and Homelessness



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Responding to trauma is, now more than ever, a public health priority. The COVID-19 pandemic has, and will continue to, impact people accessing support from housing and homelessness services, as well as the workforces that support them. Research shows that trauma can have an adverse impact on people's lives, increasing their risk of experiencing poorer physical and mental health and poorer social, educational and criminal justice outcomes than people who do not experience trauma. However, inequality of outcomes for people who have experienced trauma is not inevitable, with a growing evidence base suggesting that adopting a trauma-informed approach can help improve health, wellbeing and life chances for people affected by trauma.

Through the National Trauma Training Programme, the shared ambition of the Scottish Government, COSLA and partners is to develop a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce across Scotland. The aim of this work is to ensure we deliver services in ways that prevent further harm or re-traumatisation for those who have experienced psychological trauma or adversity at any stage in their lives and support their unique recovery journey.

As part of the programme of support available to professionals working across local authorities and other community planning partners, the Improvement Service, in partnership with the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland, hosted a series of deep dive learning events over 2020-21. Each event provided an opportunity to explore how adopting a trauma-informed approach can support key community planning priorities and support professionals to identify tangible steps to help ensure this approach is embedded in policy and practice moving forward.

The event on 23rd February 2021 provided opportunities for participants to:

- Learn about the impact of trauma and what a trauma-informed approach looks like;
- Learn from existing good practice and how a trauma-informed approach can support improved outcomes for people requiring support from housing and homelessness services;
- Hear about existing resources and support for implementation of a trauma-informed approach through the National Trauma Training Programme; and
- Discuss how a trauma-informed approach could support their area of work and organisation and identify tangible actions that can help embed a trauma-informed approach in their area of work.

This learning event brought together over 100 attendees, encompassing a wide range of professionals working to improve outcomes for people requiring support from housing and homelessness services in their local authority area who wish to learn more about trauma-informed practice, systems and services. Participants included practitioners and frontline workers, service managers, policy leads, senior leaders and Elected Members.

The event was chaired by Elena Whitham, MSP, who at the time of the event was a councillor for East Ayrshire Council. We were delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of adopting a trauma-informed approach to working with people requiring support from housing and homelessness services at a local and national

level. These included:

- John Swinney, Deputy First Minister (pre-recorded)
- Cllr Alison Evison, COSLA President (pre-recorded)
- Dr Caroline Bruce, Head of Programme, Transforming Psychological Trauma, NHS Education for Scotland
- Kenny McGhee, Throughcare and Aftercare Lead, CELCIS
- Kevin Anderson, Service Lead – Performance, Policy & Community Planning, South Ayrshire Council
- Shumela Ahmed, Managing Director, Resilience Learning Partnership
- Anthony Morrow, Community Development Officer, Sanctuary Housing Association
- Sandra Brown, Project Officer, Women’s Health Improvement Research Project, Fife Council

[View the full video playlist](#)

[Link to Speaker Slides](#)



Key Messages

While the remainder of this learning report outlines the key barriers and enablers and future action and support highlighted by participants during discussions, there were a number of key messages identified throughout the event:

- Training is a key part of developing a trauma-informed approach in systems and services, but other actions are also vital for long-term culture change, including trauma-informed leadership, meaningful engagement with people with lived experience in service design, robust evaluation of what is and is not working, and supporting staff wellbeing;
- The importance of responding to trauma and developing trauma-informed systems, services and workforces requires recognition and buy-in from senior leaders and decision makers, and leaders both locally and nationally must drive forward this agenda at a strategic level;
- No individual staff member, service or organisation is solely responsible for responding to trauma. A joined-up, multi-agency approach must be taken to ensure trauma-informed practice and policy is sustainably developed and embedded collaboratively across systems and services, shaped by the lived experience of people in Scotland who have been affected by trauma; and
- While there are numerous examples of good practice across Scotland, there is a need for tools and resources to support local areas and organisations to develop consistency and accountability.

Barriers and Enablers for adopting a trauma-informed approach to housing – key themes identified by participants



BARRIERS

People who have experienced trauma may have complex needs, and often the housing system may not recognise the support they need.

The risk to staff wellbeing and the need to provide adequate support such as supervision and coaching to undergo training and adapt to culture change.

Capacity to review practice is limited when services are so often operating in crisis mode.



ENABLERS

Clear implementation planning for organisations which details the necessary adaptations to policy and practice.

Opportunities to learn from existing good practice and break down siloed approaches.

Support for trauma champions which will enable them to embody strong leadership for this agenda.

How trauma informed is your organisation's policy and practice?

Participants were asked to reflect on existing work and awareness on a trauma-informed approach within their organisation or local area. The following key themes, actions and areas for support were identified across discussions:

- Several organisations in attendance had used resources available from the National Trauma Training Programme and had found these useful as a starting point to learn about trauma-informed policy and practice.
- Attendees noted that where there is strategic buy-in and strong leadership, the drive to implement policy and practice changes which are trauma-informed is far more effective.
- Some attendees noted that trauma-informed practice is encouraged to some extent across the sector, but there is more work to be done to ensure this is consistent across the range of support which people may access.
- It was highlighted that while there is growing knowledge of trauma-informed approaches and what this means in terms of housing, frontline workers often feel they are constantly operating in crisis mode, and therefore have very limited capacity to engage with training and planning for long-term changes to how systems operate.
- Several attendees highlighted the challenges around taking a multi-agency approach. People accessing housing services are usually accessing other services too, and it was felt by some that there is often a lack of understanding of how other services operate and generally a siloed approach, which can lead to inconsistency for people accessing services.

What action and support are required to ensure your organisation's policy and practice are trauma informed?

Participants were asked to reflect on key actions and next steps going forward that can support the implementation of a trauma-informed approach in their area/organisation. The following points were identified:

1. Consistent training and development for all staff

Participants highlighted that more resource is needed for training and development, and to ensure that all staff have at least a basic level of understanding of trauma. It was also emphasised that training needs to be accompanied by a commitment to embed trauma-informed policies and practice within organisations.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Embed a trauma-informed lens into practices such as recruitment and induction, staff handbook policies, and staff check-in meetings with managers.

Managers can encourage and support staff engagement with freely accessible resources, e.g., those produced by the NTPP.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

A national baseline/ standard for training, policy and practice within organisations and services would help establish consistency.

2. Trauma-informed leadership

Participants highlighted that all roles need to be trauma informed so that people accessing services receive an appropriate and positive response at every point of contact when seeking to engage with support. This requires a multi-agency approach to embedding training and development, and strong links across all partners involved in supporting service users.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Leaders could seek to strengthen their understanding and awareness of their role in driving forward a trauma-informed approach in their service/ organisation by accessing training and development opportunities.

Leaders can help raise awareness of trauma-informed practice and policy in their own organisations and networks.

Elected Members and other decision makers can make use of resources and seek out learning opportunities.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

Networking opportunities for Trauma Champions to share learning and understand how they can work collaboratively.

Increased awareness raising and training for leaders and decision makers and targeted engagement with these groups.

3. Multi-agency working which addresses complex needs

Participants emphasised the need for a whole systems approach, recognising that people engaging with the housing sector are often accessing multiple services, and that moving between/ across different systems can often be re-traumatising. They also recognised that many people in the housing system have complex needs and a joined-up approach is needed to ensure services can respond to this collectively.

ACTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS

Seek opportunities to work with other sectors and organisations and understand their approach and how they work with people.

Consider opportunities collectively for stronger information sharing across services, so that complex needs are not being missed and the system avoids re-traumatising people.

Engage with people with lived experience of trauma who are accessing services and ensure that organisations/services are working to address their needs.

SUPPORT REQUIRED

Opportunities for multi-agency training and development and networking to discuss how this training will be embedded and to share learning.

What action are you taking forward after attending today's event?



Review our policies and procedures to embed trauma-informed practice into our service.



Add an agenda item to discuss trauma-informed practice at team meetings.



Bring people with lived experience of trauma into our service.



Progress with internal conversations about rolling out the training programme.



Review resources and signpost to colleagues.



Link up with new contacts and plan ways to share learning.

Summary

Looking ahead, stakeholders identified the need for:

- National standards or guidance on embedding consistent staff training on trauma-informed practice, and support to align this with adaptations to policy and practice within organisations/ services.
- A multi-agency approach to developing trauma-informed practice, recognising that a joined-up approach is more likely to improve outcomes for people accessing services.
- A focus on leadership through training and awareness raising on their role in embedding trauma-informed approaches.
- Increased networking opportunities to share learning on trauma-informed practice for staff at all levels.

Next Steps

- The findings and recommendations from this learning report will be shared with members of the National Steering Group for Trauma Training, chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, and will be used to inform future delivery and implementation of the National Trauma Training programme.
- The Improvement Service, in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Government, have launched an online community of practice, free and available to all professionals across Scotland who are interested in finding out more about trauma-informed policy and practice and who would like to share learning. To join, please visit: <https://khub.net/group/trauma-informed-approaches-in-scotland/group-home>
- The Improvement Service, NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Government are supporting the development of a network of trauma champions, who are senior leaders across local authorities, NHS Health Boards and other key community planning partners. The trauma champions will be supported to drive forward trauma-informed practice and policy across their organisations and local areas in a multi-agency, collaborative way. For more information, please visit the [NTTP website](#).

Resources

The National Trauma Training Programme (NTTP) and e-learning resources

- The [NTTP website](#) provides information on the training and resources developed by the NTTP to support the skills and knowledge of the whole Scottish workforce. This includes access to e-learning modules, videos about the benefits of trauma-informed practice, and information on the Scottish Trauma-Informed Leaders Training programme (STILT).
- This [interactive PDF](#) summarises the key trauma training resources from the NTTP that are openly available to support all members of the Scottish workforce to strengthen their understanding of their role in responding to people affected by trauma.
- This [Trauma Informed Practice Toolkit for Scotland](#) has been developed in collaboration with experts by experience and provides clear, tangible examples of where trauma informed practice has been successfully embedded across different sectors of the workforce.

Improvement Service briefing and infographic

[Taking a trauma-informed lens to COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation](#)

In partnership with COSLA and NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service has published a briefing to highlight how adopting a trauma-informed approach to Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation agenda can support key priorities, including improving outcomes for vulnerable people and communities affected by trauma and supporting workforce wellbeing and resilience.

[Infographic: A trauma-informed approach to Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation](#)

In partnership with NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service has published an infographic briefing to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on people affected by trauma, and how a trauma-informed approach can support Scotland's COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation agenda.

Staff support and wellbeing

Below is a link to a resource developed by NHS Education for Scotland that provides an overview of support available for staff wellbeing.



Join our new community of practice on the Knowledge Hub

This Knowledge Hub group is for professionals across Scotland who are working to adopt a trauma-informed approach across policy and practice. It is a safe space for professionals to connect to each other and share good practice, learning and resources. National partners NHS Education for Scotland, the Improvement Service and Scottish Government will also share useful information and resources. It is free and easy to join the Knowledge Hub.

To join, please visit: <https://khub.net/group/trauma-informed-approaches-in-scotland/group-home>

Stay up to date

Follow the Improvement Service and partners on Twitter to stay up to date with future events and new resources:

[@Improvserv](https://twitter.com/Improvserv)

[@NES_Psychology](https://twitter.com/NES_Psychology)

[@IS_VAWandTrauma](https://twitter.com/IS_VAWandTrauma)



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