



A promise was made; a promise must be kept

From the Independent Care Review to Scotland's first Change Programme – an overview of Scotland's current journey towards becoming a country that cares.

The Promise Scotland's submission to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2021 Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care

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1. Introduction

Scotland's [Independent Care Review](#) began work in 2017 and published its conclusions on the 5th February 2020, in the form of 7 reports, the main volume of which was [The Promise](#). The conclusions include 80+ calls to action. It listened carefully to babies, infants, children and young people in care, and care experienced adults across Scotland. Over 5,500 people told their stories, with more than half having experience of the 'care system', the remaining being members of the paid and unpaid workforce.

[The Promise Scotland](#) was set up in July 2020 to support implementation of the Care Review conclusions. Originally incubated within Scottish Government, it was established as a non-statutory company with a dual role of oversight and support in April 2021. Its structure includes a 20-strong Oversight Board, more than half of whom have experience of the care system. The Promise Scotland will publish three plans, each lasting for three years outlining the priorities and actions across that period. As per the Care Review's conclusions, the 80+ calls to action will be mapped and sequenced so that implementation is completed in full by 2030, at which point The Promise Scotland will cease to exist. The Oversight Board will use the plans to monitor the progress organisations make individually, and the progress Scotland makes collectively towards The Promise's key priorities. They will report to the care community and parliament on progress.

The Care Review had children's rights at its core – indeed the Children and Young People's Commissioner was the co-chair of the Rights group. One of its key calls to action was around UNCRC implementation but also that children's rights were about the maintenance and upholding of relationships.

The preamble of the UNCRC is especially meaningful for the Care Review, which made clear that Scotland needs to do much more to support families to stay together as they are "the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children."

This submission outlines work that is happening to ensure implementation of the conclusions of The Care Review and the role of The Promise Scotland in driving the necessary change.

It is important to note, that Scotland has high levels of commitment and collective buy in and progressive legislation, including specific rights and entitlements for care experienced people and extended throughcare and aftercare legislation. However that legislation has not always tracked through into the consistent upholding of children's rights.

It is in that context of high commitment and shared vision, that The Promise Scotland has the critical role of; supporting those with responsibility to implement change; and, through public reporting, hold to account for the pace and progress of change.

Core to keeping the promise is supporting families to stay together – where children are safe and loved, they must receive all they need to stay together. Instead of a 'system', there must be a country that cares and loves, nurtures and supports children and families according to their needs. The work to do this is already ongoing in Scotland, grounded in and driven by the thousands of care experienced people who selflessly shared their experiences in the hope of change.

2. The Independent Care Review Conclusions: an overview

The Care Review's conclusions comprised of seven reports:

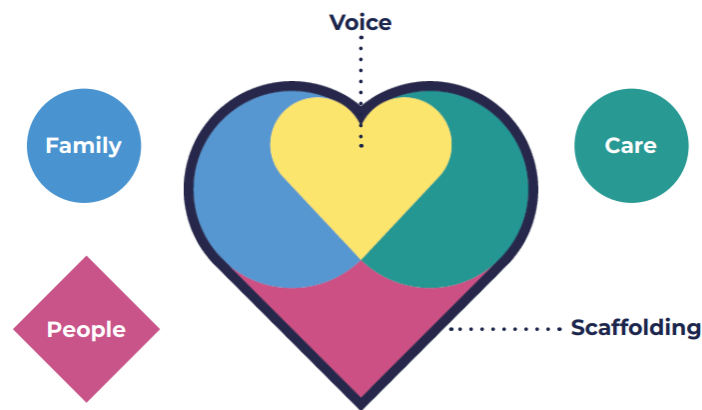
[The Promise](#) reflected what over 5,500 care experienced children and adults, families and the paid and unpaid workforce told the Care Review. It laid out the changes needed for Scotland to live up to its ambition that all children grow up 'loved, safe and respected.'

[The Plan](#) explains how this change must happen.

[The Money](#) and [Follow the Money](#) explain how Scotland can invest better in its children and families.

[The Rules](#) demonstrates the current legislative framework and how it must change to achieve The Promise. It also included a separate [thank you](#) to the thousands of people who contributed to the Care Review.

The main promise report identified five foundations which must be at the heart of Scotland's reorganisation of how it thinks, plans and prioritises for children and their families:



Voice: Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.

Family: Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.

Care: Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.

People: The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.

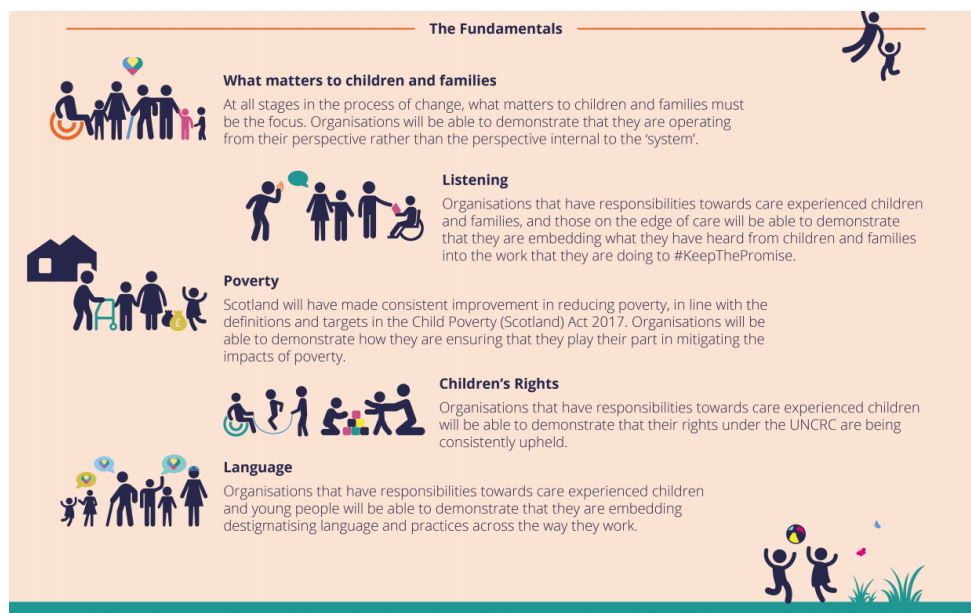
Scaffolding: Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

The five foundations contain 80+ calls to action, full details of which can be found in [the promise report](#).

3. Implementing the conclusions of the Care Review

3.1 Plan 21-24: The priorities for the next three years

Published in March 2021, Plan 21-24 outlines the priorities for 2021 to 2024. It is made up of five priority areas. These focus on making significant and substantive changes to the lives of care experienced children, families, and young people across Scotland. They lay the groundwork for ongoing change that will be built upon in Plan 25-27. The priority areas for the next three years are: A good childhood; whole family support, supporting the workforce, building capacity and planning. It also identifies five fundamentals that must underpin any and all work that organisations undertake in relation to care experienced children and families (see below). Crucially, Plan 21-24 seeks to ensure that Scotland's implementation of the UNCRC is aligned with implementation of the conclusions of the Care Review and that the most profound human rights issues are dealt with swiftly (eg 16 and 17 year olds in the criminal justice system)



Below is a summary of Plan 21-24 priority areas. Full details of Plan 21-24 can be found [here](#)

A Good Childhood

By 2024:

Support – access to intensive support for all children living ‘in care.’

Education – care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school

Relationships – No barriers to children spending time with people they care about. Brothers and sisters will not be separated (unless for reasons of safety).

Youth Justice – 16 & 17 year olds will never be placed in Young Offenders Institutions. Children will be cared for in small, secure, safe, trauma-informed environments that uphold their rights.

Advocacy – all care experienced children and families will have easy access to advocacy and legal advice representation.

Moving on – transitions will be focused on needs not ‘age of services’ criteria. There will be a range of affordable housing options and youth homelessness eradicated.

Physical Intervention – Restraint will be rarely used and only to keep a child safe; it will always be pain-free. Guidance will uphold children’s rights and reflect equal protection legislation. The workforce will feel supported to respond in a trauma-informed way.

Whole Family Support

By 2024

Family Support – all organisations will have embedded the 10 principles of family support.

Peer and Community Support – there will be places in every community for parents of young children to meet.

Service Integration – family support services will feel and be experienced as integrated.

Family Therapies – all families will have access to family therapies

Planning

By 2024

Planning – children will not be profited from and care placements will not be sold to local authorities outside Scotland. Acute and crisis services will be phased out.

Investment - The Human and Economic Cost modelling that underpinned [Follow the Money](#) and [The Money](#) reports will be embedded across Scotland.

Information sharing – organisations will be confident about when, where, why and how to share information with partners

Supporting the workforce

By 2024

Workforce values – there will be a national values-based recruitment and workforce development framework adhered to across Scotland.

Trauma informed – trauma-informed practice is demonstrable across all organisations

Ongoing relationships – no blanket policies or guidance preventing maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them

Workforce Support – A framework of support in place ensuring the workforce feels valued, encouraged and supportive.

Building Capacity

By 2024

Legislation – progress made towards ensuring Scotland’s legislative framework is coherent and cohesive, upholds the conclusions of the Independent Care Review and is compliant with the UNCRC

Children’s Hearing System – will have gone through a redesign process.

Inspection and Regulation – development of a new framework which values what children and family’s value.

Policy Coherence – alignment across Scotland

3.2 Change Programme ONE - the first plan of action

[Change Programme ONE](#), published in June 2021, is the first in an ongoing programme of actions aligned to the priority areas identified in Plan 21-24. It outlines what is happening now, what is happening next and what needs to happen and includes an assessment of whether it is sufficient. It includes commitments from organisations across Scotland about what they are and will do differently based on what matters to children and families. Live and dynamic, it will be continually updated so it is always in the best shape to drive Scotland forward to #KeepThePromise.

The content comes from engagement with the organisations that have responsibility to change shape first or most and are referred to in the Change Programme as ‘lead organisations’. These include local authorities and COSLA, Education Scotland, Care Providers, Advocacy and Legal Services Providers, SSSC, Care Inspectorate, CHS, SCRA, Scottish Sentencing Council, Police Scotland and Scottish Government. It is explicit about whether what is being done and what has been committed to is sufficient to #KeepThePromise.

Many of the meetings to discuss [the promise](#) included multiple agencies, reflecting the joint working taking place across local partnerships to support children and families, demonstrating a sustained, shared commitment for doing things differently. The focus of the conversation was: what is happening now, what is planned and what is getting in the way of progress.

The Promise Scotland has made an assessment of the work against three categories. In nine areas, work is underway; in fifteen areas work is underway but does not yet appear sufficient; and in one area there is little or no work underway.

This is the first Change Programme and was produced in the shadow of COVID-19, but it clearly shows there is a lot to do. The Promise Scotland Oversight Board will consider it, review mismatch and lack of alignment between national and local, system and service, practice and culture and so on.

The Change Programme is intended to be flexible, rather than static, so as to be able to adapt to best – based on the most up to date information – drive progress.

3.3 The Role of The Promise Scotland

The Promise Scotland provides support designed to support and drive the change demanded by the Care Review.

This includes:

Join the Dots: capturing, documenting and embedding learning about what is working, where and why to accelerate the pace of change.

Communities of Interest: setting up and facilitating communities of interest to bring together or signpost individuals, practitioners, and organisations around specific topics to galvanise action for change, to learn and collaborate, and to promote practice that reflects what matters to children and families.

The Promise Design School: offers people with care experience the training and skills to collaborate and design public services. The programme has already been piloted and once fully tested and evaluated there will be open access to service design guidance, tools, methods and ideas generated by service redesign approaches for all those who wish to learn and use this approach. Barriers that might prevent people with from taking part in co-design events, including digital access, will be removed.

The Data: Currently the data landscape is fractured and populates itself via a series of discrete data requests made to multiple agencies. It must be cohesive and connected and reflect what matters to children and families. The Promise Scotland will 1) understand what matters to children and families in data terms and 2) map all the data currently held that provides a measure of experience, which directly or indirectly impacts children and families lives and outcomes. This includes but is not limited to poverty, employment, housing, social work, health and education.

The Money: building upon the Care Review work, The Promise Scotland will support organisations and partnerships to shift thinking about how money is spent. The aim is to ensure that public money is invested upstream and focused on prevention, rather than spent on crisis interventions that deliver poor outcomes for children and young people and poor value for money. The Promise Scotland will offer support across three levels: local places and families, services; and national systems. It will identify and break down perceived barriers to using the money differently including governance, accountability, and scrutiny systems.

The Promise Partnership: Funding is available for organisations and intended to deliver change in line with Scotland's commitment to creating capacity in the 'care system' to #KeepThePromise and provide holistic family support. The Decision Makers Panel, a group with lived experience of Scotland's 'care system', assists in the final funding decisions.

Oversight and Monitoring: The Oversight Board is the primary mechanism for holding all of Scotland's organisations and sectors to account, ensuring there is progress made at pace. It will report at least annually both to Parliament and the care community. These reports will contain detail on what is happening across Scotland in line with Plan 21-24 and whether progress is sufficient to #KeepThePromise, drawing from the Change Programme. The Promise Scotland will produce regular monitoring reports for the Oversight Board.

4. Conclusion

Scotland's plan to #KeepThePromise by 2030 is ambitious. Change of this scale and nature requires adapts to legislation, policy, practice and culture across literally hundreds of organisations, national and local, resulting in many implementation cracks, fissures and chasms. It also requires careful sequencing, with some aspects not being able to shift until something else does, a breadth of responsibility and shared accountability that risks excuses like 'it's not us that's not moving, it's them – they're in our way'.

But it is not impossible. This is new territory for Scotland, but there is collective buy-in to the change required. This has created an authorising environment for sequenced, collaborative implementation across multiple sectors and agencies towards a single, shared long-term vision. More than 100 organisations willingly got involved with devising Plan 21-24.

At a national level, political responsibility sits with the Deputy First Minister, with references across eight Cabinet Secretaries and five Ministerial portfolios, 26 of 43 Scottish Government directorates and 49 of 117 policy areas. But full cross-party support to #KeepThePromise means that there is no political impediment to getting on at pace. As Scotland emerges from the shadow of COVID-19, it has never been more important to bridge the gap between political intent and the lived experience of children and families – unprecedented support means that there has never been a greater opportunity to do so.