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Education and Gaelic Committee

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28



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Education and Gaelic Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, with the exception of culture, and on matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry, redress and languages



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Introduction

1. One of the Committee's key objectives for Session 7 is scrutiny of how Scottish Government legislation and policy translates into practice, including the level of progress, policy implementation and delivery challenges, barriers to change, including fiscal constraints and variability of outcomes.

2. In keeping with this key objective, the Committee agreed to focus its pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28 on two distinct policy areas—

   - The Reduction in Class Contact Time (RCCT); and
   - Progress towards delivery of the Promise.

3. The Committee took evidence from witnesses during five evidence sessions at its meetings on 15, 22 and 29 September 2026 and 6 October 2026. A list of the written evidence submitted in association with these sessions is published on the website.

4. The Committee thanks all those who provided evidence, which has informed this report and its aim of influencing the Scottish Government's Draft Budget, due to be published on 3 December 2026.

Fiscal Environment

5. The upcoming 2027-28 Scottish Budget will be introduced at a time of challenge for public finances and within the context of a commitment to public service reform. The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Cabinet Secretary) stated in a letter to the Committee dated 20th October 2026 that "Scottish public finances continue to face a challenging fiscal environment. Successive budgets and medium-term financial strategies have highlighted the trade offs required to deliver a balanced and sustainable financial position." She added that since the publication of the Spending Review in January 2026 "the funding position has been effected by a number of developments" including the Scottish Fiscal Commission's (SFC) fiscal update on income tax reconciliation.

6. In its latest fiscal update in August 2026 the SFC reported that the "economic outlook has weakened since our last forecasts in January 2026 and the OBR's last forecasts in March 2026." They note that the Scottish Government's day to day spending is expected to fall by 1.2 per cent in real terms in 2027-28. [1]

7. The SFC also note that "the 2027-28 Scottish Budget will be reduced by £720 million for a negative Income Tax reconciliation…While the Scottish Government can borrow to manage the reconciliation, it is likely to exceed available borrowing capacity, reducing funding available for public services in 2027-28." [1]

8. **The Committee recognises the challenging fiscal environment which faces the Scottish Government in delivering Budget 2027-28. The Committee also notes that there have been economic and political developments, with**

consequences for funding and spending since the publication of the SFC's fiscal forecasts alongside the 2026-27 Scottish Budget and Spending Review, in January 2026.

9. **It is within this fiscal context that the Committee considers the commitment to RCCT and progress towards delivery of the Promise below.**

RCCT

10. In its Programme for Government 2021-22 the Scottish Government stated –

> Over the course of the Parliament, we will provide funding to support the recruitment of at least 3,500 teachers and 500 classrooms - over and above the 1,400 recruited during the pandemic - with further funding to enable councils to make these posts permanent. This will give teachers the capacity to reduce contact time by an hour and a half a week which they can use to prepare for lessons, raise standards and undertake professional development. [2]

11. In December 2024, the Scottish Government said that both it and Local Government had agreed to make meaningful progress towards reducing class contact time for teachers and that medium and long-term joint workforce planning would take into account the importance of responding to issues including different local needs.

12. In February 2025, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) lodged a formal dispute with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) after agreement could not be reached on how the additional 90 minutes (taken from contact time) would be used and the timescales for implementation. Planned industrial action by the EIS prompted intensive negotiations between the Scottish Government, EIS and COSLA. [3]

13. Following a ballot of its members, on 6 March 2026, the EIS announced it would take industrial action in relation to teachers' workload and a lack of progress in the reduction of contact time.

14. Ahead of COSLA Leaders' special meeting on 13 March 2026, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the EIS issued a joint letter to COSLA Leaders urging them "to take the decisions needed to avoid industrial action and to join us in implementing a reduction in class contact time (RCCT)."

15. COSLA issued a statement following the Leaders' special meeting which said "despite concerns being expressed by councils, in the interests of reaching a constructive way forward and attempting to avert planned strike action, Leaders have agreed to support the joint approach." [4] COSLA also stated that it expected the proposal to be fully funded by the Scottish Government and estimated costs of around £250-310 million per year and that implementation will require more consideration. COSLA also highlighted "challenges to fully implementing in all parts of the country due to recruitment shortages in both rural, remote and island communities and in specialist subjects." The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the COSLA estimate "is not accurate and, frankly, not affordable. [5]

16. On 21 May 2026, the SNCT issued a joint agreement on the reduction of class contact time, signed and ratified by all three parties. This agreement states that the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Teachers' side agree to introduce a national reduction of class contact time of 90 minutes per week, with phased implementation. The agreement also states that the "Scottish Government will provide full funding for the implementation of the reduction in class contact time,

including all necessary workforce expansion and associated costs." [6]

Policy Objectives

17. The Committee sought to explore with witnesses the policy objectives of reducing class contact time.

Teacher Workload

18. The EIS is clear in its written submission that "significant steps to address unsustainable workload, such as reducing weekly class contact time, are imperative for both teachers and young people as learners." This is because "excessive workload has a huge impact on teachers' health, safety and wellbeing and undermines teachers' ability to teach effectively." They highlighted that "data and assessment requirements, admin and clerical tasks and pastoral care continue to be the biggest three drivers of excessive workload, according to teachers in our Big Question annual survey."

19. EIS state that RCCT "represents a step forward in tackling unsustainable, unfair and unhealthy levels of teacher workload, by increasing the time each week that teachers have available to undertake the preparation of learning, teaching and assessment, in turn enhancing educational outcomes for young people." [7]

20. EIS told us that independent research which they commissioned in 2024 "showed that, on average, teachers work the equivalent of a day and a half per week over and above their 35 contracted hours" and the bulk of that "is spent undertaking activities related to the preparation of learning, teaching and assessment because there simply is not enough time in the working week for teachers to do all that." [8] This was the reason "the teachers' side of the SNCT strongly advocated for the full 90 minutes that would be freed up from the reduction in class contact to be allocated to that component of a teacher's working week." [8]

21. School Leaders Scotland (SLS) told us that it "is clear that the workload of teachers is too high." [9] They are "committed to the principle of supporting RCCT to support our teachers to experience a more manageable workload." In their view reduced workload "should mean less work-related stress and more time to plan high-quality learning and teaching experiences, in turn leading to improved outcomes for children and young people." [10]

22. NASUWT state that "commitment on class contact time was a recognition by the Scottish Government that additional time away from the classroom was necessary to give teachers sufficient time and space to plan, prepare and assess pupils' work in order to help students achieve their best and raise attainment." [11]

23. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the agreement "represents a significant investment in Scotland's teachers and in the quality of education for our children and young people." She added–

> By providing more protected professional time, we are responding to the principal ask on reducing workload pressures and supporting a more sustainable profession. It will mean more planning time for lessons, and opportunities to provide timely and meaningful feedback to students. It will, for example, mean time to prepare tailored content for lessons for children with additional support needs. [8]

Planning and Preparation Time

24. In their written submission EIS state that with "rising levels and complexity of need in schools across Scotland, and the systemic under-resourcing of Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision, the importance of reduced class contact time being devoted to the planning and preparation of learning, teaching and assessment is self evident." [7] SLS told us that RCCT "will provide more time to meet the needs of young people who are affected by poverty." [12]

25. The EIS written submission also states that eradicating the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap, "requires front-line interventions which can only be accessed as a result of teachers observing and evaluating, planning and implementing direct interventions at classroom level. Without this additional time, the gap will continue to grow."

26. EIS told us that teachers "are already struggling and striving to plan and prepare on as individualised a basis as possible in order to meet the needs of all the learners in their classes." Furthermore, "there is just not enough time in the working week for all of the activity that should take place on assessment, which should be largely formative. That was our endeavour when curriculum for excellence was introduced." [13] They "believe that teachers having more time to devote to the planning of individualised learning and teaching, and to evaluating assessment, should have a positive impact on the experiences of those learners." [14]

27. The Cabinet Secretary told us that "having more professional time will allow the class teacher a more tailored approach to the additional support needs that they face in the class. They report to us that, sometimes, they feel that they cannot do the best for those young people because they do not have the time to prepare to teach them well." [15]

28. The Cabinet Secretary told us that RCCT "will support young people with ASN in the classroom. I do not accept for a moment that the investment is divorced from the needs of ASN children. It will support them very much, because their teacher, who stands in front of them and tries to get the very best for them, will have more time to prepare and think about how they do that."

29. COSLA states in its written submission that "COSLA Leaders have continued to raise significant concerns around this policy" and "we do not know the value this policy will bring to children and young people in terms of their wellbeing and learning. We will seek to explore this further with Scottish Government." [3] The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) told us that they "cannot

say whether we can quantify the value of the policy." [16]

30. COSLA also has "concern that sufficient meaningful consultation and engagement with children and young people has not been undertaken. Local Authorities and national government have separate but complimentary legal responsibilities to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments, island assessment and consultation is undertaken prior to implementation." [3]

31. The Committee asked the Cabinet Secretary what consultation the Scottish Government carried out in relation to RCCT. The Cabinet Secretary answered that RCCT "was the principal and foremost ask in respect of reducing teachers' workload" and that the SNCT "is a very important forum for gathering the voice of the teaching profession as well as that of the local authorities and the Scottish Government." [17]

32. **The Committee is unclear how the policy objective of reducing class contact time by 90 mins is expected to reduce teacher workload while simultaneously also providing teachers with time for additional preparation and learning. If teachers are being asked to use the reduction in class contact time to spend more time on preparation and learning to, for example, support the needs of ASN children, it is not clear how this amounts to a reduction in workload.**

33. **The Committee agreed in our Strategic Plan that we add value to the policy process within our remit "with a view to supporting children's rights and influencing better whole life educational outcomes for the people of Scotland." [18] Within this context we believe that there needs to be greater clarity in relation to the policy objectives of the reduction in class contact time particularly in relation to how it benefits our young people.**

Purpose

34. The agreement on RCCT states that "the additional 90 minutes of reduced class contact time will be allocated entirely as undirected Professional Time." [6] This includes but is not limited to–

- Planning and preparing teaching and learning (including appropriate differentiation for learners with additional support needs).
- Preparation for the implementation of inclusive pedagogy and support strategies.
- Sourcing and preparing learning resources. Planning and preparing assessment of learning.
- Assessing and evaluating learners' progress on a continuous basis.
- Reflecting on and providing individualised feedback to learners. Professional reflection.

- Collaboration with colleagues on all of the above, as appropriate.

35. Fulltime teachers in Scotland are contracted to work a 35 hour week, of which up to 22.5 hours is currently allocated to class contact. The remaining non-class contact time comprises 7.5 hours for preparation and correction, and 5 hours for collegiate activity. Scottish Government officials told us that "non-class contact time is divided between collegiate time, which is directed and largely applies to school activities, and what used to be called prep and correction but will now be called professional time, which is self directed time." [19]

36. ADES told us that when the OECD "recommended providing staff with more time for planning and preparation, that was also about allowing staff to use non-class-contact time to come together to work collaboratively on wider system improvement." [20]

37. ADES explained that the "McCrone agreement used a metric to determine how non-class-contact time is divided and split" but that this "is not being applied to the additional time, so it is difficult to know how we will be able to effectively monitor and evaluate the positive impact that we hope something of this size and scale would have on children and young people." [20]

38. ADES told us that a "lot of the tripartite discussions were distilled down to the use of the 90 minutes" but for "some reason, the metric in the McCrone agreement was not considered to be acceptable, nor was it agreed as a means to address the issues." [21]

39. COSLA told us that "one area of negotiation was about what the additional non-class-contact time would be used for" and that in "the original part of the negotiation, we were focused on the OECD's definition, which is wider than what has been agreed." However, while COSLA and the Scottish Government were relatively closely aligned "the unions were keen on having not the wider OECD definition but a narrower definition around preparation and correction." [16] COSLA explained that "it was agreed that the additional non-class-contact time would come under what would have been the heading of 'preparation and correction', but that would be redefined as "professional time", and there would be scope in further negotiations to define what that professional time was to be used for." [16]

40. COSLA's view is that the "additional 90 minutes of RCCT will be allocated entirely as undirected 'Professional Time'. This is the biggest change to teachers' terms and conditions since the introduction of the original McCrone Agreement and requires considered implementation." [3]

41. ADES told us that they have "made no secret of the fact that we would have liked more of the available non-class-contact time to be given to collegiate and system-wide improvement activity. We have had those discussions with the trade unions, but we are where we are." [22]

42. ADES told us that a "key part of curriculum improvement development is about coming together and working with colleagues. If the total 90 minutes is all for an individual to direct, that diminishes the opportunity for some of that collegiate work."

21

43. ADES told us that in their view the driver for RCCT is the OECD report on *Improving Schools In Scotland* (2015) which sets out 12 recommendations "which were about the fact that there should be more protected time for teachers to plan learning, more time for assessment and moderation and more structured time for professional collaboration and strengthening collegiate activity for system-wide improvement…". [23]

44. SLS told us that "originally, we would have argued for some of the 90 minutes to be used for collegiate and collaborative work at school level. However, the negotiations led to our agreeing with the proposal that all 90 minutes would be for teachers to direct their own professional time. At some future point, if there were to be a further reduction in class contact time, we would argue for some of that time to be used for collegiate and improvement work led at school level." [24]

45. The Cabinet Secretary stated that the Scottish Government recognises "that a teaching profession that has more professional time, more scope for preparation, more scope for feedback and more scope for tailoring curriculum content and lessons is a profession that is working best for young people." This includes "how it will create opportunities for young people to get more specialised time with a specialised teacher, whether that be in music, art, physical education or whatever…" and "teachers will have more scope to give meaningful feedback to young people to identify their needs and the ways in which we can support them to make progress. [17]

46. **The Committee is unclear why the additional 90 minutes of reduced class contact time will be allocated entirely as undirected Professional Time and why the metric to determine how non-class-contact time is divided and split in the McCrone Agreement was not applied. We note from the evidence which we received that there is clearly a lack of consensus in relation to how the additional 90 minutes should be allocated. It is not, therefore, clear why this decision has been reached.**

47. **The Committee believes that the lack of consensus around how the additional 90 minutes should be allocated raised questions regarding whether this is the best outcome for our young people.**

48. **The Committee's view is that there needs to be more clarity as to why the metric used in the McCrone Agreement has not been used to allocate the additional 90 mins of reduced class contact time and how this benefits our young people.**

Funding

49. The Scottish Government and COSLA published a joint statement in December 2024 setting out a number of agreed measures including–

- working together to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels next year, and

freeze learning hours which will support the learning experience for pupils across Scotland;

- to make meaningful progress towards reducing class contact time for teachers, in recognition of the asks made by teachers and teaching unions. Medium- and long-term joint workforce planning will take into account the importance of responding to issues including different local needs.

50. The Scottish Government committed to increase the funding available to local government to £186.5m including £145.5m in full in 2024-25 as well as additional funding of £28 million from 2025-2026 to develop the Additional Support for Learning (ASL) education workforce. [25]

51. In his report on *Strengthening Scotland's Education System Through Empowered Schools*, the Scottish Government's Independent Professional Advisor for Future School Reform states that that the "2024 financial boost for teacher numbers did not have the desired effect. The reasons for this are not clear. It is safe to say that school leaders and the parental community alike are disappointed with the apparent disconnect between rhetoric and reality."

52. The Independent Professional Adviser also states in his report that following "the money allocated to reduce teacher class contact time has been equally challenging. There have been media releases from national and local government that seem to contradict each other's claims." In his view improved "transparency and shared understanding of the flow of monies through the levels of the system would help to explain why this happens, and presumably to reduce the risk of repetition." [26]

53. COSLA told us that the initial workforce planning modelling commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2023 was "a very basic calculation that did not take account of geographical factors or the fact that, if you lose one child out of a class, that does not mean that you need one fewer teacher or part thereof." Since then the Scottish Government "has done a slightly more sophisticated form of modelling, taking account of the change in pupil numbers. In discussion with COSLA, a factor has been applied for small schools." COSLA explained that modelling "is ongoing, and we are getting closer to the overall cost. We have moved from having quite a large difference in cost in 2023 to something much more logical." [27]

54. As noted above, the SNCT Agreement states that the "Scottish Government will provide full funding for the implementation of the reduction in class contact time, including all necessary workforce expansion and associated costs." COSLA estimates the annual cost of the policy to be "up to £250-310M per year." [4]

55. Also as noted above, the Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that the COSLA estimate "is not accurate and, frankly, not affordable." She added that estimate "was out of date on the pupil roll, and it did not consider phasing." When asked what the cost would be she replied that "I am still doing the work to understand the conditions in each locality, in order to work out how much it will cost." [28]

56. COSLA's view is that the "agreement to phase implementation is expected to reduce the cost to a degree but it will still require significant investment in the teaching workforce, which risks the opportunity cost of resourcing other services." [3]

Additional Support Needs

57. The Committee sought to explore with witnesses the opportunity costs arising from the funding of RCCT. For example, whether the funding could be more effectively employed in funding additional support needs staff. The Committee asked would it be better to prioritise the spend on additional support needs and classroom assistants to alleviate some of the pressures on teaching staff, so that there is continuity of the core teacher in the classroom, with support around them?

58. ADES told us that if "we were starting with a blank piece of paper, and if there was the opportunity for investment, I would certainly like to see more investment going into additional support needs and the ASN workforce." They also told us that there is also a need to "look at the entirety of the education workforce, not just teachers but the additional support staff who are called different things in different schools and who do invaluable work. Those core staff are absolutely central to the success of any school and therefore to the success of any pupil, so anything that can be done to support that workforce would be really critical for schools." [29]

59. EIS told us that that "43 per cent of children in our mainstream classes have a recognised additional support need. Every teacher in Scotland's schools has responsibility for responding to that range and complexity of additional support needs." [30] They also told us that teachers "are struggling with the under-resourcing of additional support needs provision in schools." [31]

60. SLS stated that they "would absolutely support the need for more support staff in schools, particularly to cope with the massive increase in additional support needs, and the need for those staff, who do a vital job in schools, to be paid more than they currently are." [32]

61. NASUWT told us that it "is important that we consider the importance of teaching support assistants" and that it "is absolutely fundamental to the running of a school system that we have an adequate number of those staff, particularly given the increase in additional support needs in the system that was outlined earlier." [33]

62. NASUWT told us that "we have a significant amount of Barnett consequentials coming to Scotland as a result of decisions being taken in Westminster regarding special educational needs and disabilities" and that "there are discussions about how that should be ring fenced and used in Scotland to provide support for pupils with ASN, which undoubtedly should include the provision of support for learning assistants, as well as additional teaching staff." [33]

63. In February 2026 the UK Government announced a £4 billion investment over three years "to make every school truly inclusive and transform outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)." [34] The SFC note that this additional investment "generated additional funding for the Scottish Government. This includes £533 million in 2026-27 and more than £300 million in 2028-29. However, there is very little new funding in 2027-28." [1]

64. The Scottish Government has stated that £632m of additional Barnett consequentials "are being applied through the Autumn Budget Revision. The largest element of this is £533 million arising from non-recurring UK Government funding

provided to local authorities in England to address deficits within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system." [35] The Scottish Government also states that the "largest element of funding deployed in the budget revision is being provided to the Health and Care portfolio, totalling £566.9 million, to support demand and inflationary pressures alongside reducing waiting times and increasing capacity within the wider healthcare system." [35]

65. The Cabinet Secretary also told us that she is "giving close consideration to the issue of additional support for learning and the exceptional workforce that supports it." [15] For example, in Budget 2026-27 "an additional £29 million was dedicated to additional support for learning: £28 million went to councils, and £1 million was used by Education Scotland to create training tools to support the workforce who are involved in that work." [15]

66. The Independent Professional Advisor for Future School Reform states that that it is not possible to ascertain whether the ASL workforce capacity increased in line with the £28million increase in funding and the £1million allocation for recruitment. This is due to the challenges in obtaining workforce data from across our 32 local authorities." [26]

Spending Review

67. The Scottish Government published a Spending Review in January 2026 which sets out multi-year spending plans for the period up to 2028-29. This includes indicative level 2 figures up to 2028-29 for the Education and Skills portfolio as set out on the table below.

Level 2	2026-27 (£m)	2027-28 (£m)	2028-29 (£m)
Total Education and Skills	3,556.1	3,594.5	3,592.1

68. The Spending Review states that this "settlement provides stability, enabling the portfolio to sustain delivery, embed reform and maximise the impact of available resources, while protecting priority services and front-line provision and the best teacher-pupil ratio in the UK" [36] . It also states that the settlement "supports our continued investment in the teaching workforce, sustaining high quality teaching and learning." [36] There is no mention of the additional funding required to implement the commitment to reduce class contact time.

69. **The Committee notes that indicative spending for the Education and Skills portfolio is relatively flat over the period of the Spending Review and that the fiscal environment has become more challenging since the Spending Review was published in January 2026. The Committee also notes the SFC's view that the Scottish Government's day to day spending is expected to fall by 1.2 per cent in real terms in 2027-28. This suggests that the funding of any new policies in 2027-28 including RCCT will need to be funded from existing budgets.**

70. **The Committee recommends that full costings for RCCT are published in**

the 2027-28 Budget including how they will be funded.

71. **The Committee asks the Cabinet Secretary to respond to the view of its Independent Adviser for School Reform that the "2024 financial boost for teacher numbers did not have the desired effect" and that the "reasons for this are not clear. It is safe to say that school leaders and the parental community alike are disappointed with the apparent disconnect between rhetoric and reality." [26]**

72. **The Committee notes that the Barnett Consequentials arising from SEND are significant but non-recurring. The Committee, therefore, asks the Cabinet Secretary why the non-recurring £533 million has been allocated to day to day spending in 2026-7 given it will not be available in future years? For example, to what extent was consideration given to allocating at least some of the funding to the Scotland Reserve for draw down in future years?**

73. **The Committee agrees with the Independent Professional Adviser's recommendation that there "should be clear tracking and transparency of monies allocated to school education from national government grants, through local authorities and within schools, closely adhering to the principles and expectations of the Scottish Public Finance Manual." [26]**

Workforce Planning

74. COSLA's written submission notes that the timescales for implementation of RCCT "were set through national negotiation rather than on the basis of deliverability" and identifies a number of challenges in meeting those timescales. These challenges include –

- Significant teacher shortages remain in parts of the country, and reductions in probationer numbers mean the system may not have enough teachers to meet the policy's requirements.
- Teacher training recruitment targets have not been met in most subjects, with particular pressures in maths, English and the sciences.
- Councils face pressures in particular subjects and locations, making it difficult to maintain subject choice for learners and complete school timetables. The commitment to reduced class contact time is likely to intensify these pressures.
- Councils already use a range of recruitment initiatives to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-fill areas and posts and will continue to do so as they develop implementation plans. However, regardless of funding, reduced class contact time may not be deliverable in some parts of the country because of limited teacher availability. [3]

75. ADES identify similar challenges–

- The implementation of RCCT will require a significant increase in teaching capacity across school settings. This is not solely a question of increasing overall teacher numbers; it also requires the availability of teachers with the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet local workforce needs.

- Local authorities continue to experience recruitment challenges in certain geographical areas and across a number of secondary subject specialisms. While recruitment patterns vary across Scotland, some authorities face greater challenges in attracting and retaining teachers, particularly in rural and remote communities.

- In secondary schools, existing recruitment challenges within specific subject areas may become more pronounced as additional staffing is required to support reduced contact time. This may require headteachers to review timetabling arrangements, curriculum models and staffing deployment in order to maintain a sustainable curriculum offer.

- While preparatory work has been undertaken, the successful delivery of RCCT remains dependent on the availability of sufficient teaching staff and sustainable funding to meet the additional workforce requirements. [37]

76. COSLA state that “teacher census data shows that the child population is falling more slowly than previously expected. If primary teacher numbers remain at 2023 levels, as part of the Scottish Governments policy for teacher numbers, reduced class contact time is likely to be several years away, even in theoretical terms.” [3]

77. COSLA state that teacher availability “varies by geography and subject, and Scotland cannot be treated as a single system in which teachers can simply be moved to meet demand” and that some “areas have rapidly growing populations, while many rural areas face significant recruitment constraints. These geographical and local challenges mean councils may be unable to implement reduced class contact time consistently.” [3]

78. The Committee asked some of our witnesses what can be done to address the challenges around recruitment of teachers in rural and island communities. COSLA told us that the “current training system does not require new teachers to go to a particular area” which means “there is a limited amount that can be done to address supply.” [38] However, some financial incentives for recruitment are available in Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles as well as to a number of named islands within Highland and within Argyll and Bute. This includes a pay supplement of more than £2,000 annually and a remote schools allowance. The Scottish Government has also “promised an additional £1 million so that more remote councils can apply mitigations to encourage people to move to those areas.” [38]

79. The Committee also explored with witnesses whether financial incentives could be provided to recruit teachers in subject areas where there are significant shortages. COSLA responded that “from the point of view of terms and conditions or the way in which the SNCT is structured, that is not something that we could do without the agreement of our teaching unions. I suspect that they would not agree to that, because they like the idea of everybody being on the same terms and conditions for primary or secondary teaching and regardless of subject matter.” [39]

80. SLS told us that there "are particular issues in secondary schools and in particular subjects. We often talk about that with regard to rural and island areas, but there are subject shortages in some of the big cities, too." [40] They added that it "is hard to see how the problem could be resolved in the next two to three years—well, it will be less than three years, now, until the implementation of reduced contact time at secondary level." [40]

81. The Committee explored with witnesses whether recruitment gaps needed to be addressed before reducing class contact time? EIS responded that "is one of the reasons why there is the time lag with implementation at the primary level, where we have a surplus of qualified teachers." The EIS also recognise that there "are geographical challenges, but there are also challenges across a large number of subject areas. Three years should be sufficient time, certainly if we are all working together, to begin to address some of those challenges." [41]

82. SLS state in their written submission that there is a great deal of concern among their members "about the deliverability of RCCT for secondary schools, even with an implementation date of August 2029. Whilst the necessary changes to the structure of the school day and to school timetables will undoubtedly present challenges, these are not insurmountable. The much larger issue is the availability of appropriately qualified teaching staff." [42]

83. Among the challenges identified by SLS are–

- reducing individual teachers' class contact time creates additional teaching periods that must be staffed somewhere else;
- in schools already unable to fill posts, members repeatedly question where the additional teaching capacity will come from;
- secondary staffing is organised by subject specialism, so RCCT can create many multiple small staffing requirements that are individually difficult to recruit to;
- members anticipate a range of possible consequences if additional capacity is not available: narrower curriculum choice, reduced provision in smaller/ shortage subjects, more combined or split classes, greater use of non-specialists, increased dependence on supply staff, and additional teaching/ cover by senior leaders.

84. The view of SLS is that "RCCT generates additional staffing requirements at a time when many schools report that they do not have sufficient capacity to meet existing needs." They emphasise that, while they support the principle of RCCT, successful implementation "will depend not only on urgent action to improve teacher recruitment and secure sufficient appropriately qualified, subject-specialist staff across Scotland, but also on realistic timescales, effective planning and recognition of the wider reform context in which schools are being asked to deliver it." [42]

85. The Cabinet Secretary told us that the Scottish Government has "made £7.5 million available to allow local authorities to review their workforce, consider gaps, and think carefully about how they were going to implement the policy to ensure that it does not lead to an erosion of curriculum content, because we cannot let that

happen." [43]

86. COSLA state that work "has not yet begun around establishing whether the necessary supply of teachers will be available to support delivery of the policy to the agreed timetable." [3]

87. **The Committee recognises that there are considerable challenges related to workforce planning in implementing the reduction in class contact time within the planned timescales. This applies especially in relation to secondary schools. The Committee also notes COSLA's view that the timescales for implementation of RCCT "were set through national negotiation rather than on the basis of deliverability."**

88. **The Committee is unclear as to whether, given the evidence set out in this report, the commitment to RCCT remains deliverable within the planned timescales? For example, given the recruitment shortages in rural, remote and island communities and in specialist subjects. The Committee remains unclear whether the timescales are deliverable both in terms of workforce planning and the challenging fiscal outlook.**

Continuity of Learning in Early Years, Primary and Special Schools

89. ADES raise concerns around continuity of learning arising from RCCT in early years, primary and special schools in relation to–

- Progression in learning;
- Consistency of support;
- Need to consider peripatetic models for staff particularly in ELC. [37]

90. ADES state that consideration "needs to be given to ensuring coherence in the overall curricular experience for pupils, and that staff are not only delivering the curriculum in silos. There is the potential for negative impact on children's interdisciplinary learning and for de-skilling of staff." They also suggest that consideration "will need to be given to specific pupils and the planning required to meet their needs. Continuity of experience for learners needs to be considered as part of the discussions for refreshed professional time." [37]

91. ADES told us that the proposal for RCCT "will bring in further opportunities for more transitions and potential discontinuity." [22] They pointed out that "the number of adults and teachers who interact with children and young people in primary schools will be increased in any given week. For our very youngest children, it is a concern that the same adult or adults will not be with them for the entirety of their class contact time, which remains unchanged." [44]

92. ADES also explained that a "young person might have one teacher until the break

and a different teacher after the break. After a transition, it can take longer for children to settle, or they might not settle as well. If you increase the number of transitions, you need to be mindful of the amount of support that is provided." [20]

93. **The Committee believes that it is essential that all policies related to the schooling of our young people are child centred including RCCT. The Committee, therefore, asks what impact assessment has been carried out in relation to this policy including in relation to issues such as continuity of learning and positive educational outcomes.**

Monitoring

94. ADES state that given "the significant, additional national investment in realising this policy ambition, there are currently no clear metrics of impact/success that will be able to be monitored, evaluated and reported" and recommend that an investment on this scale merits such an approach. [37] They told us that for "such a significant investment in the education system, it is a concern for us that those metrics have not been established at the very beginning." [45]

95. The Cabinet Secretary told us that she is "clear that we need to monitor the implementation of RCCT, and assure ourselves that it is having a positive impact on learning and teaching." [46] She added that "how that monitoring will work will be developed with the SNCT." [47]

96. **The Committee notes COSLA's view that "RCCT is the biggest change to teachers' terms and conditions since the introduction of the original McCrone Agreement and requires considered implementation." Given this, the Committee believes that it is essential that the implementation of RCCT is subject to rigorous monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The Committee agrees with ADES that it is concerning that "there are currently no clear metrics of impact/success that will be able to be monitored, evaluated and reported." Indeed, as noted above there remains a lack of clarity around policy objectives against which success might be measured. The Committee is unclear what action the Government could take after the policy is implemented if evaluations showed no impact or negative impact of RCCT on learning outcomes for young people.**

Progress towards delivery of the Promise

97. Reform of the children's care system in Scotland began with the Independent Care Review, which was commissioned in 2017. A key purpose of the review was to look at how Scotland might address the inequality of outcomes care experienced people face in many areas of their lives, such as health and education. People with experience of the care system represented half of the review group's co-chairs and working group members. During the lifetime of the review, the views of over 5,500 care experienced children and adults, as well as parents, carers and the care workforce, were listened to.

98. The review findings, set out in The Promise, were published in 2020 and the Scottish Government accepted the recommendations of the review. The Promise gives a vision for a Scotland where, by 2030, all children grow up loved, safe and respected with effective support reducing the need for children to go into care. This vision is built on five foundations—

- **Voice:** Children must be listened to and involved in decisions about their care.
- **Family:** Children feel loved and safe in their families and families are given the support they need.
- **Care:** Children must not be separated from their brothers and sisters wherever possible.
- **People:** Care experienced children must be supported to develop relationships.
- **Scaffolding:** Children, families and the workforce must be supported by an accountable system that provides help and support when required.

99. Following publication of the Promise—

- The Promise Scotland was set up by Ministers as an independent organisation to oversee change. Its goal is to enable Scotland to 'keep the promise' to care experienced children and young people by 2030.
- Independent Review chair Fiona Duncan was appointed to the role of Independent Strategic Advisor. This role currently includes chairing The Promise Scotland and providing strategic advice to civil servants, though the role is independent from the Scottish Government.
- The Oversight Board was set up to review progress and has so far published four progress reports.

100. The Promise Scotland does not hold statutory powers or responsibilities; its role is to oversee, drive and support change. It works with organisations and individuals all over Scotland to help others deliver change for care experienced children and young people.

101. The Oversight Board reviews progress toward implementing the Promise and has published progress reports monitoring change. The first report was published in

May 2022 and the latest report, Report FOUR was published in September 2026. [48]

Implementation and delivery

102. The Committee explored how implementation of the Promise was progressing, including levels of accountability, monitoring and data collection and linkage.

103. In 2025, half way through the Promise timetable, Audit Scotland conducted a performance audit on the delivery of the Promise and produced a report, Improving Care Experience: Delivering The Promise. The Committee drew on Audit Scotland's findings as part of its pre-budget scrutiny of the children's care system reform and delivery of the Promise.

104. The report found initial planning for the Promise by the Scottish Government and COSLA did not "give sufficient thought" to how it would be delivered and resourced. As a result, public bodies were not given a strong foundation to work from and that progress has been slow. [49]

105. In Session 6, the Public Audit Committee wrote to the Education, Children and Young People Committee recommending "delivery of Audit Scotland's recommendations should be closely monitored to identify whether delivery progress is being made at the pace and momentum required to meet the 2030 timescale."

106. Among Audit Scotland's findings were [50] —

- a lack of a "consistent and shared understanding" of how the Promise would be delivered.
- a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities.
- a lack of available data, difficulty in quantifying and tracking funding for delivery of the Promise.

107. Audit Scotland found that from the outset, the Scottish Government did not adequately plan how it would define, measure and monitor progress on the Promise. It said it was difficult to know to what extent the Promise is being delivered as the lack of consistency in approach across Scotland is a barrier in understanding, measuring and delivering progress on the Promise overall. [51]

108. Following the report, The Promise Scotland, the Independent Strategic Advisor on The Promise, Scottish Government, COSLA and SOLACE issued a joint statement in response, stating the recommendations would be reviewed and responded to, and the organisations remained "steadfastly committed to working in partnership to keep the Promise."

109. The Promise Scotland published updates on areas highlighted in the Audit Scotland report, setting out planned actions which included the development of a data map, an information sharing project, information about updates to Plan 24-30, and clarity around roles and protocols. The Promise Scotland, said they intend to write to Audit Scotland at the 12-month point to provide a fuller update. [52]

110. The Scottish Parliament's Information Centre (SPICe) set out some of the steps taken towards implementing the Promise as follows [53] —

- Legislation to help siblings in care stay together came into force in July 2021. This is set out in the Children (Scotland) Act 2020.
- The 2021-22 Programme for Government (PfG) committed to a Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.
- The Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) facilitated by The Promise Scotland published its report setting out recommendations for the redesign of the children's hearings system.
- The Scottish Recommended Rate of allowance for foster and kinship carers was introduced. Local authorities are at various stages of implementing this.
- The Scottish Government introduced the Care Leaver Payment from April 2026 - a one-off payment of £2,000 for those leaving care.
- The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 raised the age of referral to the Children's Hearings System from 16 to 18 and ended the placement of 16- and 17-year-olds in young offenders' institutions.
- The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act 2026 (The 2026 Act) was passed at the end of Session 6. Once enacted, this will extend eligibility for aftercare support for young people leaving care to those leaving prior to their 16th birthday, extend corporate parenting duties, require Independent Fostering Agencies to become charities, give Scottish Ministers powers to make regulations requiring non-local authority residential care providers to provide financial and operational information, make various changes to the children's hearings system and add integration joint boards to the list of bodies required to plan children's services.

111. The Promise Scotland published plans which sets out the steps towards the delivery of the Promise. The latest of these is Plan 24-30 and the Story of Progress.

112. The Scottish Government published an implementation plan in 2022, followed by a progress update in 2024. The then Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise said in that update [54] —

> With six years to go I am confident that the Promise can and will be kept, given the progress we have made already, the way we are currently setting the foundations now for more preventative actions, and the will and ambition of all of those who are working towards change.

113. The Oversight Board's latest report from September 2026 stated the "next 6 to 18 months will determine" whether the Promise can be kept by 2030. It called for the Scottish Government's updated implementation strategy to provide further clarity about what changes are to be made, who is responsible for making them and how change will be measured. [48]

114. COSLA highlighted that The Story of Progress recognises that no single measure can reflect the scale and complexity of the Promise but rather "it brings together information from three complementary perspectives: national indicators, organisational change, and the experiences of care experienced children and young people." They commented that local authorities reported that the route maps are

"not yet functioning as a shared planning framework to support local delivery" and called for "clearer prioritisation, sequencing and alignment between ambition, delivery expectations and the resources available to support implementation." [55]

115. Who Cares? Scotland said that many Promise route maps did not go beyond 2027, and that the plans had not been updated since the passage of the 2026 Act. [56]

116. Social Work Scotland argued that clear and costed assessments of what it will take to effect change and what capacity will be needed in all the respective services should be produced and should sit alongside the route maps. They said [57] —

> Those assessments will be complex documents that will enable members of the Parliament, the care-experienced community and the workforce to hold to account those who made the Promise and are responsible for delivering it.

117. The Promise Scotland said that Plan 24-30 is "well developed, but some bits need a lot more work" [58] and conceded that they could be clearer about what capacity and workforce are required, and on how much a particular programme will cost in relation to individual parts of the Promise. [59]

118. Social Work Scotland, echoed this point and said it was difficult to have a clear assessment of progress given the high level of interdependent activity in the children's sector. They used the example of activity and reporting requirements around child protection and how this impacts on the delivery of the Promise. [60] They also questioned whether the organisations that hold responsibility for the route maps have the permissions needed to develop them into implementation plans with accompanying resource assessments. [52]

119. CELCIS highlighted research which found that implementation of the polices and legislation in relation to the Promise remain inconsistent across services and local areas and argued that more needs to be done to ensure the full and consistent implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and services for adults "which are often a crucial part of the support needed by families." [61]

120. COSLA highlighted their annual Promise reports which sets out activity underway across all 32 local authority areas and shows "continued progress in embedding rights-based and relationship-based approaches, strengthening participation and voice, developing trauma-informed practice, expanding whole family support, and improving multi-agency collaboration." They acknowledged differing approaches across local authority areas due to the different contexts in which they operate, including varying demographics, geography, levels of need, workforce challenges and existing service provision. They stated [55] —

> As a result, while there should be consistency in ambition and outcomes, progress at a local level must be understood and assessed within the context of individual communities, their needs, and the challenges they face.

121. This point was made by the Oversight Board who said that the Promise does not require services to look identical in every community and that local services should be able to respond to local circumstances. They argued however, that this does not mean there should be any variation in whether children and families can obtain the

"help, relationships and rights" they need. [48]

122. The Promise Scotland acknowledged that the pace of change is uneven across policy and geographical areas and "there remains a substantial gap between what has been committed to and what is consistently experienced by children, families, and care experienced adults." [62]

123. The Promise Scotland said that, where reform requires new duties or responsibilities, there needs to be a clear understanding of the implementation resource required - not only the immediate cost of the legislative change but the capacity, workforce and infrastructure needed to make it work sustainably. They said this was particularly important in relation to the 2026 Act. [62]

124. COSLA too told of the importance of understanding the costs of any new policies or duties. They said [55] —

> There is a growing concern that policy ambitions are frequently agreed before implementation costs are fully understood or funding arrangements are clear. Where this occurs, local authorities can find themselves carrying significant delivery risk while remaining fully accountable for outcomes.

125. CELCIS also made the point that the successful implementation of legislation, such as the 2026 Act, is key to delivering the Promise and said that this will require detailed modelling, investment and implementation support. [61] The costs associated with the implementation of the 2026 Act are discussed later in this report.

126. The Promise Scotland emphasised the importance of the cultural and relational changes which have been made. [62] This was echoed by the Oversight Board, who also stressed that listening to the views of those with care experience should lead to better decisions or changes in the support they receive, although this does not always happen. They stated [48] —

> Scotland should already be much better able to show whether children and young people feel heard and whether what they say affects what happens to them. The issue now is not whether Scotland listens. It is whether participation has consequence.

127. The Oversight Board questioned the scale and pace of change still required to achieve the Promise and said in its latest report currently the evidence does not provide confidence that the Promise will be kept by 2030. They said [48] —

> If keeping the Promise was like building a home, the foundations have been laid and some of the walls are up, but after six years the country should be much further forward.

128. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee she was “very keen” for the Scottish Government to set out an updated implementation plan “as soon as we can”. [63] The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (The Minister) confirmed that a high-level implementation strategy will be published "by the beginning of next year" and that a delivery coalition will be established. She said [64] —

> We want to establish a timetable and identify who is responsible for what. A risk register will also be included as part of that work. I hope that that answers the question

Accountability

129. In its report, Audit Scotland said that responsibility cut across various sectors which made it difficult to assign accountability and ensure each sector is responsible for its role in contributing to delivering the Promise.

130. Audit Scotland highlighted that bodies represented within Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs), and other corporate parents are responsible for implementing changes to deliver the Promise. They commented that CSPPs report to the area Community Planning Partnership on children's services more widely, "but there is no formal mechanism for CSPPs to be held accountable specifically for delivering thePromise." The report stated [51] —

> While there is a need for all bodies and sectors across national and local government to take responsibility for their role in delivering the Promise, accountability for delivering the Promise at a national level ultimately lies with Scottish ministers, supported by the civil service.

131. Witnesses all agreed that delivering the Promise requires multi-agency working across different sectors which can raise questions around accountability for delivery and other challenges. The Promise Scotland stated that responsibility does not lie with one single organisation rather that implementation responsibility "is distributed across Scottish Government, local government, local partnerships, health and social care, education, justice, the third sector and others. " [65]

132. COSLA agreed that there is not one single organisation responsible for the delivering the Promise and that it is a collective commitment. They said [66] —

> The Promise is a collective one that we made as a country; it is not just the promise of all elected members in this Parliament. You collectively have the same commitment to deliver the Promise that councillors across chambers in Scotland have, that the whole workforce has and indeed that our communities have.

133. COSLA highlighted that delivery of the Promise requires coordinated action at both local and national levels across a wide range of organisations and sectors, with many of the factors affecting delivery extending beyond local government such as housing supply, placement sufficiency and access to specialist provision. They stated [55] —

> Progress will be strongest where responsibilities, accountability and resources are clearly understood, aligned and shared appropriately across partners, and where national and local organisations work together effectively to support delivery in communities.

134. Social Work Scotland acknowledged the shared commitment to deliver the Promise however they questioned the blurred lines of accountability around delivery and

prioritisation. They stated [67] —

> Social Work Scotland members continue to report uncertainty regarding "governance" of the Promise change programme, and relatedly, questions of accountability. Who, for example, is responsible for ensuring that the care workforce has the capacity it needs to deliver the services and outcomes we expect it to (through legislation and policy)? And if new national priorities pull the attention of system leaders away from the Promise, who should be held accountable for that?

135. Social Work Scotland also noted that while the Scottish Government could not deliver the Promise on its own, others involved in delivery needed to feel they had the means to deliver on responsibilities and to be held to account for them. They said— [68]

> This work is being driven elsewhere and not by us and others who have the delivery responsibility, so we are trapped in this slightly odd place.

136. CELCIS highlighted its research on the delivery of the Promise which found good examples of multi-agency working, but also reported barriers such as short-term funding, workforce instability, siloed practices, and unequal influence between professionals. They argued that these challenges must be addressed if the Promise is to be delivered and said leaders across CSPPs have a pivotal role in "driving and sustaining whole-system reform and ensuring that practitioners have the structure, permissions and resources they need to deliver support, as well as fostering collaboration across services." [69]

137. CELCIS, explained the complexities involved whereby responsibility is shared with some organisations delivering services and other organisation "create the conditions for change." They argued that local leaders should be supported in deciding what to stop funding and what to invest in where there is no additional funds. [70]

138. Who Cares? Scotland, spoke of an "accountability vacuum" and a lack of clarity around responsibilities in relation to delivering the Promise. [71] They suggested that it would be helpful to have a single point of focus in terms of accountability which in turn could delegate that authority to others. They said [72] —

> At the moment, we cannot find the source of the accountability, so it might be helpful to bring it back to a single point in order to then break it back down again. That would be clear and transparent, and would help us to be able to point to who is responsible for what needs to be done.

139. When asked directly, who should be responsible for delivering the Promise, The Promise Scotland, said that they did not believe that "central Government telling people what to do is the way to do that." They stated— [73]

> I am not at all sure that pinning on one bit of the system the responsibility for driving through change across the system is the way to go. It has to be owned by everyone. That approach will be messy at times and it does not feel terribly satisfactory, because it is not.

140. The Oversight Board said that responsibility sits with those who decide resources, priorities, structures and the conditions in which services operate. They said [48] —

> Government must be able to change its own processes when they stand in the way of timely action, rather than leaving children, families and the workforce to manage the consequences.

141. A Scottish Government official confirmed that CSPPs are responsible for reporting annually on delivery against a range of measures and outcomes related to corporate parenting and GIRFEC and that each CSPP also publishes a three-year plan setting out its approach on these areas. [74]

142. The Cabinet Secretary said the delivering the Promise will require "sustained investment, clear leadership and strong partnership right across national and local government as well as civic services, with the voice of lived-experience individuals always at its heart." She said that Scottish ministers provide national leadership on the Promise, and that "the minister and I are committed to creating the conditions that are needed for change, to driving that change and to working across Government and across society on that effort." [75]

Monitoring and data

143. Audit Scotland, in their report, commented that the scale and complexity of the Promise means it is difficult to know if positive change is felt for each individual and family but they said that a greater proportion of children are living with family in kinship care, and there are fewer children under the age of five entering care which would indicate a positive trend. They questioned how delivery of the Promise is measured and said [76] —

> CSPPs monitor and report on progress locally, and elected members are responsible for monitoring progress at a local authority level – and are accountable to their communities. A lack of robust planning as to how the Promise would be measured means that information is not routinely or robustly collated nationally.

144. The Committee heard of the importance of seeking the views of those with direct experience of the care system to fully understand if progress is being made on delivering the Promise and if their experiences are improving. CELCIS and Social Work Scotland both stressed the importance of improved data collection and analysis to understand the experiences and needs of children, young people and families, as well as those who care for them and that this should inform planning and decision making. [61] [77]

145. Who Cares? Scotland argued it was not possible to know how the Promise was being implemented due to the lack of data and that the "amount that we do not know is quite striking. " They said there was insufficient funding for data collection and a lack information sharing and understanding across organisations. [60]

146. The Oversight Board commented that Scotland holds a considerable amount of data but made the point that this data should be better linked to data on care-

experienced young people and used to inform decisions and support the delivery of the Promise. They gave the example of its scrutiny of premature deaths and said— [78]

> Scotland holds substantial information across health, justice, homelessness and public services, yet care experience is not routinely visible across those datasets. Better linkage could help identify where support fell away and where opportunities to intervene were missed. Collecting information without using it to change what happens next is not enough.

147. They highlighted the call for a longitudinal study of children who are looked after at home, which could be used to inform future policies and, again, stressed the importance of data linkage. [79] This point was echoed by CELCIS who agreed for the need to focus more on qualitative data and highlighted the forthcoming Bright Spots publication on wellbeing and placements. CELCIS stated [79] —

> Indeed, some of our research has shown that one of the challenges in the system is the lack of data linkage and organisations being unable to share information because they work with different systems. We absolutely need to address that.

148. The National Social Work Agency (NSWA) suggested a more standardised and collaborative approach to data collection be adopted. [80] They stressed the importance of recording the feelings of care-experienced young people and argued for a trauma-informed approach to recording data "to ensure that we write our records in such a way that, when children read them, they feel loved." They said "As much as it might feel bureaucratic, what we record is essential to our ability to understand and support a child." [81]

149. The Children's Services Planning Strategic Leads Network (CSPSLN) noted the challenges around collating data around how loved and valued care-experienced people feel, saying the system was not good at collating this information but also cautioned that data collection needs to be proportionate. [81]

150. When asked what progress is being made on ensuring care-experienced young people receive lifelong loving relationships, the Cabinet Secretary described the work being done on placements and on GIRFEC. The Minster also highlighted the work being done by Moray Council on "ongoing connections" which other local authorities could learn from. [82]

151. The Cabinet Secretary also spoke of the work undertaken in relation to collecting and collating data on care experienced young people to help inform future support and services and that the Scottish Government is considering the possibilities of a longitudinal study through a young person's life. She highlighted the problems associate with data sharing and linkage and General Data Protection Regulations and stated [83] —

> We are trying to break down that sort of thing, and public service reform presents us with a really good opportunity to do so, because it allows us to look, in this moment, at the way in which services are delivered—in this case, around children who require support and their families—and ask how we would optimise that, if we were starting again, and who we would require to co-locate or share information or to take decisions together. We are working on all of that just now.

152. The Minister highlighted the new reporting duties under the 2026 Act which require details of the number of deaths of children and young people who were looked after by the local authority or were in receipt of continuing care at the time of their death. The Cabinet Secretary expressed caution in relation to the collection of data on deaths of all care-experienced people saying that some people would not want this information collated. She said [84] —

> Some people are very proud—some consider it part of who they are and their community, but others do not want to go through their whole life knowing that, when they pass away, that will be noted. It is a delicate balance.

153. **The Committee believes that there is a lack of clarity around the implementation, delivery and accountability on the Promise which makes it difficult to measure progress with any certainty. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government addresses this lack of clarity around the implementation, delivery and accountability in the new implementation plan due to be published early in 2027. This should include detail about how it is addressing the recommendations made in the Audit Scotland report. The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government introduces a formal mechanism for CSPPs to be held accountable for delivering the Promise.**

154. **The Committee believes it is essential that the measurement of progress on the Promise should include data on young people's direct experience of care services and the extent to which children and young people have a positive stable, loving and long lasting relationship into adulthood. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to set out how it plans to improve data collection and linkage to help inform future decisions and policies around implementation of the Promise.**

Resources

155. Written evidence from CELCIS, COSLA, The Promise Scotland, Social Work Scotland, and the NSWA all highlighted the need for sustained investment in reform in order to deliver on legislative and policy commitments in relation to the Promise. Alongside this, they listed significant pressures potentially impacting on progress including workforce recruitment and retention issues, a shortage of foster carers, suitable homes, and financial pressures across the public sector. Social Work Scotland said that the true costs of implementing various elements of the Promise were not “fully understood at a national level.” They went on to suggest the Promise Scotland or Oversight Board could usefully publish independent assessments of capacities required for various elements of change. [85]

156. The Promise Scotland referred to the Audit Scotland figure that, in 2023/24, local authorities reported that they spent £1.2 billion on services related to care experience and commented [62] —

> It illustrates the need to spend differently, not simply to spend more. The Promise requires a systematic shift from crisis intervention towards prevention and early and ongoing help and support, with investment decisions based on the needs of children and families rather than organisational boundaries. The national budget and local planning processes must take account of this.

157. Moving from crisis intervention towards prevention and early support is discussed later in this report under preventative funding and whole family support.

Current capacity

158. The Committee heard concerns regarding current capacity in relation to the workforce and care accommodation.

Workforce

159. During Session 6, the previous committee carried out ongoing scrutiny of the Promise and heard evidence on workforce issues in December 2024. The previous committee commented specifically on the the workforce challenges in the expansion of aftercare as set out in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning Bill (CCCESP Bill).

160. The Scottish Government set up the NSWA in March 2026 to support the social work profession and coordinate national policy. The PfG 2026-2031 commits to working with NSWA and partners, including local government, to ensure a "sustainable social work workforce and the best support for them to help deliver on our shared priorities.” [86]

161. NSWA spoke of the importance of developing a workforce plan and the need to "determine collaboratively what workforce we need, where and why we need it and what we need for the future." [87]

162. The Committee heard that a Memorandum of Understanding “around a real

collective focus on workforce" between NSWA, Social Work Scotland and COSLA had been in place since June this year. [88] Social Work Scotland argued that there is not the workforce capacity to deliver the current demand for care services and that the additional responsibilities in the 2026 Act could be detrimental to the delivery of the Promise. They stated [67] —

> As previous evidence to Parliament has made clear, our members are concerned about the cumulative impact of national reform activity in children's services, not all of which is as connected and sequenced as it needs to be. And most critically, for reform objectives to be realised there needs to be the workforce capacity necessary to make the change, and then, subsequently, to sustain the change.

163. Social Work Scotland, emphasised the lack of capacity in the current system to deliver the Promise. They said [89] —

> Core to my written submission today and to all of the contributions that we have made to Parliament over the past six years is the view that, unless there is a really coherent and aggressive plan to increase the capacity of the system, whether that involves carers, advocates, social workers or family support workers, we are not going to deliver the Promise. That is our assessment.

164. NSWA stated that the ambitions of the Promise rely on a suitably qualified, experienced and sustainable social work workforce and that many of the principles underpinning the Promise reflect established social work practice. [90]

165. The Oversight Board, in its 2025 third progress report, called for the Scottish Government and COSLA to produce the Joint Workforce Improvement Plan "as a matter of urgency." It stated [91] —

> We recognise the pivotal role of social workers. The workforce comprises more than social workers, residential care workers and foster carers, and includes a range of professionals from housing support, teachers, the police, a variety of health professionals including GPs and other primary care providers, befrienders, mentors etc. They may work in the public, third or private sectors... To deliver the Promise by 2030, we need empowered workers, bold leaders and determined change-makers.

166. In its latest report, the Oversight Board said the introduction of NSWA was an important development but commented the Joint Workforce Improvement Plan has yet to be delivered. [48] The Oversight Board highlighted the repeated calls for a Joint Workforce Improvement Plan [92] —

> That plan was announced by the Government and supposedly agreed by COSLA. In our last report, which was published 20 months ago, we called for it to be delivered; it has not been, and we now have the National Social Work Agency saying that the plan will be coming soon.

167. COSLA commented that workforce capacity remains one of the "most significant risks to successful delivery." They highlighted that recruitment and retention challenges continue across social work, social care, housing, education and mental health services and said that local authorities are working collectively with partners

to respond through "workforce planning, recruitment and retention initiatives, and leadership development activity." [55]

168. The Promise Scotland acknowledged the importance of having a sustainable workforce to deliver the Promise. It said among the significant pressures making the next four years to 2030 challenging include "the availability of safe and loving homes for children, foster carer recruitment, recruitment and retention across the unpaid and paid workforce, particularly children's social work, and the wider financial and demand pressures across public services." [62]

169. When asked how workforce capacity could be addressed given the need for public service reform, Social Work Scotland acknowledged the current financial situation would involve reducing the overall size of the public sector workforce and that this "creates a tension" in the delivery of the Promise. [93]

170. The Cabinet Secretary said that supporting the social work workforce is a "major priority" to which the Scottish Government is committed to and referred to the newly established NSWA. [94] The Minister confirmed that the NSWA is working with COSLA and Social Work Scotland to develop a strategic plan on the workforce, which is due in spring 2027. [95]

171. The Cabinet Secretary was asked to reconcile the aims public service reform and those aims of the Promise which requires increased workforce capacity. She spoke of the work being done to boost the current social work workforce and said [96] —

> ...regardless of PSR and of the fact that we are not awash with public money, we understand the centrality of the social work workforce to that objective and we want to support it...I want to give an absolute assurance that the objective of public service reform is not cuts or efficiencies; it is better delivery for people in Scotland.

Care accommodation

172. In June this year, Scotland's 32 Chief Social Work Officers issued a joint statement declaring an emergency in relation to providing suitable placements for children. It stated [97] —

> The capacity of the care system is saturated, and it is only thanks to the incredible efforts of Scotland's carers, social work staff and other professionals that we have been able to prevent the system collapsing entirely.

173. CELCIS, The Promise Scotland, Social Work Scotland and the Oversight Board all referred to Chief Social Work Officers joint statement on a lack of suitable accommodation available. The Oversight Board stated [48] —

> Responsibility for those conditions does not sit with the individual worker. It sits with those who determine resources, staffing, priorities and how services are organised. The shortage of suitable care is an immediate example of what happens when capacity does not match need.

174. CELCIS commented that the children's services workforce is "in crisis" and referred to recent research which showed longstanding workforce capacity challenges and significant financial pressures. They said that this is further exacerbated by a lack of suitable homes. They stated [61] —

> High-quality services, and reform of services, requires a well-resourced and skilled workforce within a range of universal, targeted and intensive supports to respond to the needs of children and families.

175. The Cabinet Secretary said the sufficiency of care placements is a "big priority" and referred to the work being done on kinship carers and foster carers. [94] The Minister outlined the steps being taken to address the shortage of care placements and told the Committee [94] —

> I will indicate just a few of the actions that we are actively considering: the three child placement limit; foster care support and incentives; streamlined assessments; the development of the whole family integrated programme; service registration; and options to strengthen the recruitment and retention of foster carers, including potential incentives and support measures.

Preventative funding and whole family support

176. The Committee heard of the need for resources to be targeted towards prevention and early years support rather than crisis intervention, particularly in light of the public service reform agenda as set out earlier in this report.

177. Among the recommendations of the Independent Care Review was a call for intensive family support which should be community based, responsive and timely, flexible, and underpinned by children's rights. During Session 6, the Scottish Government committed to a Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) to offer support to families at an early stage, rather than at crisis point. The 2021-22 Programme for Government (PfG) stated this fund was to total £500m over Session 6, and that from 2030, at least 5% of community-based health and social care spend should be focused on preventative measures. However, WFWF budget allocations by the end of Session 6 totalled just under £200m.

178. The Scottish Government split the WFWF as set out below [98] —

- Children's Services Planning Partnerships to help them improve family support in local communities - £134 million between 2022 and 2025
- supporting learning and collaboration across Scotland, including independent evaluations of the programme's impact - £1.52 million between 2022 and 2025
- funding 12 cross-government projects that support system-wide change - £12.58 million between 2022 to 2025

179. Audit Scotland said in their report that it was unclear how the original £500m pledge figure for the WFWF was arrived at and that only £148m had been allocated. However it also found that "There are strong arrangements in place to evaluate the

fund and to share positive learning." [99]

180. Analysis of year 3 (2024 to 2025) of the WFWF found that local partnerships were making progress in the development of family centred, preventative support services, though challenges around workforce, funding sustainability and rising demand were highlighted.

181. The Promise Scotland, spoke of these challenges and commented on the evaluation of the fund. They explained that local systems often used new funding to recruit a whole-family wellbeing lead with recruitment taking up to six months, rather than using it for "cash-first" support. They said [100] —

> ...the whole system needs to loosen control a little bit and trust families and communities, because cash-first approaches evaluate brilliantly pretty much every time that they are used—we have had a lot of experience during the Covid pandemic and at other times when those approaches have worked

182. The Scottish Government has committed to provide a £20m Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund for charities to deliver help that is tailored to the specific needs of families living in poverty or at risk of poverty. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that this fund sits in the Social Justice portfolio budget. [101] A newly created Prevention Unit, set up to lead on the 'prevention pillar' of the Public Service Reform Strategy, will also have a role in strengthening support for families.

183. The Scottish Government has also stated it will progress an integrated Whole Family Support programme from April 2027, and that "this will provide multi-year change funding to better enable partners to meet the needs of communities and tailor support to individual families." [102]

184. The Oversight Board called for a "massive shift towards preventative spending" in addition to the "continuation of funding for services and needs across Scotland." [103] In their latest report, they made the point that moving resources from crisis towards prevention requires choices about spending to be made and will require funding of both for a period. They stated [48] —

> Scotland cannot withdraw necessary crisis provision and assume prevention will immediately replace it. For a period, essential crisis responses and earlier support will both need to be funded. If money does not move earlier and faster, Scotland will continue paying for crises while talking about prevention.

185. Who Cares? Scotland argued for a more preventative approach to funding and said that the many existing smaller funding pots should be linked together and that "restrictive criteria" should be removed to allow for a preventive approach to be adopted. [104] They expressed frustration that third sector organisations are prevented from accessing WFWF. They said [105] —

> Elements in the third sector who are experts at specific parts of the work are prevented from accessing those funds because of the criteria and the outcomes that need to be demonstrated. That is a deep frustration, because so much good work could be done.

186. COSLA also called for preventative approach to funding and which could build on

work already being carried out on strengthening preventative services. They stated [55] —

> Longer-term funding approaches that support prevention, whole family support and service redesign would provide greater confidence for local partners to invest in the changes required to keep the Promise.

187. The Oversight Board argued that the Scottish Government and local authorities must be able to demonstrate resources being moved towards prevention. They stated [48]

> By our next report, they must show what has changed through Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and the new Whole Family Support arrangements: what support has been built or protected, whether resources have moved from crisis response towards earlier help, and what difference that has made for children and families. This must include practical support that can determine whether families remain stable, including housing and homelessness prevention.

188. The Oversight Board said that whole family support should become the normal way of working and could play a significant role in supporting looked after children at home. They highlighted that the WFWF had supported valuable work, but that the investment delivered was far below the original £500 million commitment and that "there is much less evidence of the wider shift in budgets, services and decision-making than was intended." [48]

189. On whole family support, CELCIS highlighted the commitment to supporting looked after children at home, which they said was not always the case. [106] —

> Workers who have removed children have turned up at the foster carer's house and seen mattresses, beds and toys, and they have said, "Why didn't the system allow us to provide this while the child was in their home?" People are reorienting themselves to that perspective. That is not enough to deliver the Promise, but it is critical.

190. The Cabinet Secretary highlighted that the WFWF goes to Children's Services Planning Partnerships and it is for them to decide how best to use this funding. She said [107] —

> Some of that goes directly to families, when that is considered the right thing, and some of that is a cash-first approach. Ultimately, it is for local partners, who will know the family, to make the best judgment about that.

191. She spoke of whole family support in the community and told the Committee that she was working across Government on bringing budgets together to support whole family support and said she would "drive all that work in respect of the objectives of the Promise." [108] She said the Scottish Government will continue to "transform whole family support with preventative and relational early intervention support for families." [75]

Funding streams and multi-year funding

192. The complex nature of multiple disparate annual funding streams was raised by witnesses who outlined the challenges associated with the lack of multi-year funding where resources are being used to apply for funding year after year for services that were known to be required.

193. The Audit Scotland report highlighted the difficulty in tracking spending on the Promise given there is no single source of funding and that it involves a number of funding streams for multiple bodies. The report stated [109] —

> CSPPs delivering the Promise are impacted by parameters set by the Scottish Government. Individual bodies within CSPPs receive funding through various sources, each with its own criteria and reporting requirements. This can be a time-intensive process which increases the burden on local areas.

194. CELCIS echoed this point and spoke of the challenges associated with siloed funding streams including reporting burdens. They said [110] —

> Often, there are unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved and the timescales for deciding what to do with the funding. As a result, local areas often feel that they have to do what they can rather than invest in early help and prevention…We need to ensure that preventative spending does not increase the burden on local areas but instead supports them.

195. CELCIS and The Promise Scotland welcomed the plan to bring together different programmes under the Whole Family Support programme. CELCIS said this could provide "a more co-ordinated and aligned response to improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for children and young people." [61]

196. However, they said there is current lack of clarity on how different funding streams will support a preventative approach being adopted and called for the Scottish Government to set out how existing and emerging funding streams will fit together. They said [111] —

> Programmes including the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and Fairer Futures Partnerships are increasingly aligned in their ambition and are due to form part of an integrated Whole Family Support programme from April 2027. However, greater clarity is needed about the resources that will underpin this transition, the relationship between existing and emerging funding streams, and how investment will support local partnerships to move from testing and short term programme activity towards sustainable, preventative approaches.

197. The Promise Scotland, too spoke of the plans for bringing together different funding streams through an integrated Whole Family Support programme from April 2027. They said [112] —

> ...people I speak to locally, are desperately keen to find out what will happen there, because contracts and, more importantly, work with families will be funded only until March of next year.

198. The Children's Services Planning Strategic Leads Network echoed this point and

spoke of the uncertainty around future funding. They said [103] —

> I welcome the plan to bring the fairer futures and whole family wellbeing funds and programmes together, but we are still not feeling that at local level, where we still have separate reporting and separate outcome frameworks and learning partners.

199. The Promise Scotland, spoke of preventative spend in relation to support for families, including kinship carers, family friends and other trusted people in a child's life who may be able to help care for them. They highlighted the provisions in the 2026 Act on family group decision making and lifelong links as areas which should be properly invested in. [113]

200. However, the Committee heard concerns around the implementation of family group decision making. The Oversight Board described the difficulties in getting family group decision making provisions included in the 2026 Act and said that the pace of change is too slow. [114]

201. Who Cares? Scotland, also called for a preventative approach to funding and an end to short term funding for the third sector which she said was not conducive to creating an environment for implementing a strategy that will "sustain change and deliver the Promise." [115]

202. This point was echoed by COSLA who highlighted the challenges faced by local authorities operating within annual budget cycles and increasing financial pressure. They stated [55] —

> While additional funding is important, the issue is not solely the amount of money available. It is also whether funding arrangements support prevention, early intervention and longer-term service redesign rather than short-term responses to immediate pressures.

203. The Oversight Board, in its third 2025 report called for a move toward long-term funding for public services, led by the Scottish Government, with the Independent Strategic Advisor developing a strategic approach to help inform decisions about investment and disinvestment. [91]

204. In its latest 2026 fourth report, the Oversight Board reiterated this point and said that long-term funding "removes the jeopardy of repeatedly seeking money for the same essential support." They called for the Scottish Government to change the way it funds the third sector and said [48] —

> Where support is established, effective and meeting continuing need, multi-year funding must become normal rather than exceptional. Funding must reflect the realistic cost of delivery, allow organisations to retain skilled staff and protect relationships, and be agreed early enough for services to plan with confidence.

205. The Oversight Board stated [66] —

> We have said this before, but third sector organisations should not have to be thinking about whether they have to reapply for funding.

206. The Children's Services Planning Strategic Leads Network referred to the target that 5% of community health and social care funding should be on prevention and questioned whether this was being tracked. They commented that more money is being invested in prevention through the WFWF and the fairer futures partnership programme however, they said the challenge is in moving from crisis to preventative funding given the need for both. [116]

207. The Cabinet Secretary said the aim that by 2030, 5% of community health and social care funding should be on prevention is “still there” however, she stated [107] —

> ...we recognise that, instead of targets such as percentages, we need to integrate funding, make it available earlier and ensure that it is relational and supports families pre-crisis. It would be fair to say that our planning and strategy in that regard has moved on quite a bit recently.

Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act 2026 implementation costs

208. During Session 6, the previous committee carried out ongoing scrutiny of the Promise and led on scrutiny of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Bill. (CCCESP Bill). One of the recurring themes arising from this scrutiny was a lack of additional funding being made available to councils to support the additional responsibilities achieving the Promise will involve. The Committee commented specifically on the workforce challenges in the expansion of aftercare as set out in the CCCESP Bill.

209. The Oversight Board questioned the implementation plans for the 2026 Act saying "there is still no clear, published, costed and sequenced route from the Act to delivery." They highlighted the concerns raised on affordability, capacity and deliverability by COSLA and Social Work Scotland and said "workforce requirements, service capacity, guidance, funding, dependencies and responsibilities could, and should, have been developed alongside legislation rather than only afterwards." [48]

210. Who Cares? Scotland said the implementation of the 2026 Act must include funding for the right to independent advocacy. The latest Oversight Board report stated independent advocacy had to be available as soon as it was required and children must be able to rely on a “consistent trusted relationship”. [48]

211. The Oversight Board said the Scottish Government must publish a clear, costed and sequenced implementation plan for the 2026 Act which should show when provisions will commence, "who is responsible, what they will cost and what workforce, services and other capacity will be required." They stated [48] —

> Government must own the final plan; involvement of delivery partners must not become a veto or another source of delay... Capacity constraints must be addressed as an implementation responsibility, not allowed to become grounds for indefinite delay...People should not acquire a right and then discover that the service, workforce, guidance or funding needed to make it real is not there.

Aftercare

212. The 2026 Act contains provisions that, once implemented, will extend eligibility for assessment for aftercare support to young people leaving care to those leaving prior to their 16th birthday. The Financial Memorandum (FM) accompanying the Bill estimated that 484 young people would be supported in 2027-28, rising to 1,144 in 2028-29 and 1,872 in 2029 30. The summary costs to local authorities of providing aftercare support are estimated to be £2,511,000 in 2027-28, £4,954,000 in 2028-29 and £7,435,000 in 2029-30.

213. During our predecessor committee's scrutiny of the CCCESP Bill, concerns were raised that the Bill's Financial Memorandum did not provide sufficient resources for the extension of aftercare support. In a supplementary Financial Memorandum prior to Stage 3, the Scottish Government stated that updated data from local authorities and COSLA along with updated modelling on eligibility found that [117] —

> ... an increase to the additional costs associated with extending Aftercare as introduced at Stage 1 are projected to be between £5 million higher in year 1 (2027-28) to £23 million in year 3 (2029-30) than previously estimated.

214. The Promise Scotland commented that the extension of aftercare support is 'an important step towards meeting the Promise' and that the test will be in the implementation of these provisions. They argued that these changes require clear plans for sequencing, resourcing, prioritisation and implementation. They stated— [62]

> The expansion of aftercare is therefore both a new statutory responsibility and an opportunity to demonstrate a different approach to public service delivery: relational, preventative, person-centred and designed around the needs of the individual rather than organisational boundaries.

215. NSWA said expanded aftercare must improve the connection between children's and adult services, particularly for care-experienced young people with complex or lifelong needs. They stated that effective transition planning, shared accountability and clear pathways are essential to maintain support into adulthood. [90]

216. CELCIS argued that the expansion of legibility for aftercare will require consideration of financial and workforce issues to ensure its effective implementation and explained its role in developing guidance for these new provisions. They stated [118] —

> It is vital that there is a clear understanding of who the newly eligible population is. That will allow for accurate modelling which is essential in order to assess what the funding allocation and workforce required will be.

217. They went on to express concern that the latest costings for these provisions "do

not include any recruitment, training or other costs which might be required to expand capacity to provide aftercare." They argued that, as the expansion of eligibility of aftercare will bring additional responsibilities to social workers, it will therefore requite increased workforce capacity. They said [118] —

> As it stands, there are considerable vacancies across the social work profession, and the highest vacancy rates within children and families social work teams, a total of 16.7%, with 9.7% in 'main' and 7% in 'senior' roles (Scottish Social Services Council, 2025). A plan is required for how the workforce will be grown and sustained. The extension of aftercare must be matched with all the resources required for it to make the difference intended.

218. Social Work Scotland, argued for a programme for throughcare and aftercare which should set out what will be done, a structure of improvement, a vision, any legislative and non-legislative measures that will be taken and a risk register for the programme. [119]

219. The Minister told the Committee that the high-level implementation strategy for the Promise, due to be published early next year, will set out how the 2026 Act will be implemented. [64] .

220. **The Committee invites the Scottish Government to respond to the evidence in this report that there is a need for sustained investment, including multi-year funding and a cash first approach, in order to make the expected progress on legislative and policy commitments in relation to the Promise. This includes progress in relation to social work recruitment and retention issues, the shortage of foster carers and over reliance of care accommodation.**

221. **The Committee notes Social Work Scotland's view that "unless there is a really coherent and aggressive plan to increase the capacity of the system… we are not going to deliver the Promise" and asks the Scottish Government to respond to this including how it will be addressed in the forthcoming strategic workforce plan.**

222. **The Committee notes above that the SFC forecasts a 1.2 per cent real terms fall in the Scottish Government's day to day spending in 2027-28. The Committee's view is that it is essential that there is transparency and accountability with regards to how the challenging fiscal environment may be impacting on delivery of the Promise.**

223. **The Committee is supportive of a preventative approach including whole family support and joint working but believes that there needs to be more transparency and accountability around how these monies are being allocated and implemented and invested in sustainable solutions over the long-term and enhance the opportunities they offer.**

224. **The Committee welcomes that an implementation plan for the 2026 Act will be included in the high-level implementation strategy for the Promise. The Committee recommends that this must include transparency around the levels of funding, planning and accountability and embrace necessary risk**

associated for each programme of delivery.

Public service reform

225. A number of submissions to the Committee highlighted the potential impact of wider public service reform on reform of the care system. The Promise Scotland referred to the current financial climate and argued that this made public service reform "more important not less." They said [62] —

> The Promise cannot be kept simply by protecting existing patterns of expenditure. The evidence and learning from the Independent Care Review is that Scotland needs to change what it spends its money on, how it commissions services and how it measures value.

226. COSLA argued that public service reform and delivering the Promise should be closely aligned and said the changes needed to deliver the Promise are also central to effective public service reform. They said that public service reform should "strengthen preventative approaches, local democratic accountability and partnership working rather than creating additional complexity or centralisation." [55]

227. This point was echoed by CELCIS who, in responding to the Public Service Reform Committee's call for views, said public service reform provides an opportunity to improve outcomes while supporting more effective use public resources. They said public service reform should focus on how organisations work together across boundaries towards shared outcomes. They stated [118] —

> This is less about structural change and more about creating the conditions for organisations to build trusted relationships, develop shared approaches to planning and decision-making, make better use of evidence and data, and continually learn and adapt in response to changing needs.

228. The Promise Scotland, argued that public service reform should focus on "wrapping public services around communities and families." They said [120] —

> Public services are too often still being delivered in policy, funding and service silos, and families and communities have to navigate their way around an enormously complex landscape. That is the bit that we need to crack.

229. The Oversight Board highlighted the comments from Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform "that services need to become more preventative and joined up, that short-term pressures should not displace the reform required to keep the Promise, and that resources need to shift towards relational and preventative support." [48]

230. The Minister said public service reform is about reducing duplication and bureaucracy, and streamlining services. She said— [96]

> We see the Promise as public service reform in action because it has the aim of improving support for children and families through joined-up services, with a strong focus on prevention.

231. **The Committee notes the circumstances in which this year's Scottish Budget will be introduced and recognises the financial and structural challenges facing public services, which will need to be addressed. The Committee believes that children's care system reform provides an opportunity for the Scottish Government to adopt a more preventative approach to the allocation of resources which is in line with its Public Service Reform Strategy. However, the Scottish Government must ensure public service reform does not impact negatively on the reform of the children's care system and could be an opportunity to properly consider who should be delivering care.**

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