

COSLA Children and Young People Team – Overview of Policy Work

Learning Opportunities

Early Learning & Childcare (ELC)

Working closely with our member councils through the ADES networks, the team supports ongoing delivery of the 1140 hours ELC offer (through, for example, contributing to the development of national guidance and improvement work, and representing Local Government in discussions on funding and sustainable rates) as well as engaging with Scottish Government around their plans for future childcare expansion. Recent work has included agreeing the approach to delivering the £12 per hour pay uplift for staff delivering funded ELC in funded provider settings; undertaking a joint review of sustainable rates with Scottish Government; and publishing “Getting in Early”, a promotional report showcasing the key role of councils in childcare delivery.

Education – Curriculum, Assessment and Attainment

Working closely with ADES, COSLA represents the views of Local Government in national-level discussions around the curriculum and assessment. In 2023, we co-convened the National Discussion on the future of Scottish Education with the Scottish Government. The report from the discussion, All Learners in Scotland Matter, includes a new vision, values and a call to action. COSLA officers are members of the Scottish Government’s Curriculum and Assessment Board, where strategic level discussion on the curriculum for excellence, national assessment and qualifications are discussed, including the response to the 2021 report from the OECD on Scotland’s curriculum. We are also involved in a wide range of short term or subject specific work, with recent examples including:

- Learning for Sustainability
- An update to the Learning Together National Action plan on parental involvement
- Gender, race equality and LGBTi inclusive education
- Review of Personal and Social Education
- Instrumental Music Tuition and curriculum charges



COSLA officers are also members of the Scottish Government's programme board for the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and engage on the behalf of Local Government on a range of related issues including, the structure, distribution and use of the Attainment Scotland Fund and ongoing discussions around the stretch aims set by councils for improving attainment and tackling the poverty related attainment gap. Officers also engage regularly with the Scottish Government on the National Improvement Framework (NIF), includes recent discussion to review NIF measures.

Education Reform

The Scottish Government is undertaking a range of reform across education, in line with the recommendations of recent reviews by Professor Ken Muir, Professor Louise Hayward and James Withers, alongside the findings of the National Discussion on the future of education.

COSLA officers, alongside ADES, represent Local Government on the Scottish Government's education reform programme board, where there is ongoing consideration around developing plans for a replacement for the Scottish Qualifications Authority, a new independent inspectorate and a new national education body. At the same time there is discussion on potential reforms to national qualifications, to better meet Scotland's curriculum.

We worked closely with ADES, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government to support the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). In light of the recent decision by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to taper funding to the RICs and to redirect this to a proposed Centre of Teaching Excellence, we have agreed to take part in discussions without agreement on the issues. This includes membership of the Centre of Teaching Excellence co-production group.

Following the 2018 COSLA/Scottish Government joint agreement on education reform, officers were also involved in work to support the school empowerment agenda. The Children and Young People Board recently agreed to finalise guidance for school empowerment and step down the associated governance.

Education resources and organisation

Working closely with COSLA Local Government Finance and Employers Teams as well as partners across the Local Government family, COSLA represents Local Government in a number of areas which are key to the day-to-day operation of education, including:

- Discussion around teacher numbers – pressing the case for councils to have maximum flexibility to deploy resources to support children and young people.



- Responding to the Scottish Government’s plans to set minimum learning hours in statute.
- Engaging around the Scottish Government commitment for providing digital devices to school aged children, and recent discussion on a joint Digital Education Strategy
- Education legislation – including recent reforms to placing requests/education appeals functions.
- Cost of the school day, including minimum school clothing grants and the ongoing development of national school uniform guidance.

Free School Meal Expansion

In partnership with our Local Government professional associations, the team is working closely with Scottish Government to plan and agree the approach to delivery of free school meal expansion across Scotland. With the universal expansion up to p5 being successfully delivered, current work is focused on reaching agreement on funding, timescales, and phasing plans for the next phase of expansion to p6/7 pupils in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment. The team is focused on ensuring councils receive the investment and support they require to deliver commitments, and that practical delivery plans are workable for councils.

Additional Support for Learning

Angela Morgan published her report “Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential” in June 2020. Working with system partners, the Additional Support for Learning Project Board was established to take forward the recommendations within this Report. The Project Board is co-chaired by Scottish Government and COSLA Officers and is looking at improving communication, training and celebration of the success of all pupils.

Behaviour in Schools

The most recent Behaviour in Scottish Schools Report was published in 2023. It noted that the majority of pupils were well behaved, though instances of low-level disruption and high level serious and sometimes violent behaviour by pupils to fellow pupils and staff had got worse over time. An increase in misogynistic behaviour and negative impacts of the use of mobile phones were also reported. COSLA is working with Scottish Government, school unions, parent groups and others to develop an Action Plan in response to the more negative findings of the Report.

Rights and Protection

Children's Rights & UNCRC Incorporation

The team has been closely engaged over recent years in the Scottish Government's work to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. This has included working to ensure that the needs and views of councils are taken into account as approaches are developed, and that councils receive the guidance and support they need to effectively embed children's rights locally across policy and practice. The team will continue to support this work as we move towards the commencement of the new duties on public authorities (under the UNCRC legislation) coming into force in July 2024.

Child Protection

The National Implementation Coordinator for Joint Investigative Interviewing (JII) is hosted by COSLA, and this post holder supports all 32 local authorities to improve the local child protection system by implementing a new trauma-informed approach to joint investigative interviewing called the Scottish Child Interview Model. This new approach not only minimises retraumatisation of children, but also supports capturing best evidence through improved planning and questioning strategies contributing to improved experiences and outcomes for children across care, protection and justice. The work by local authorities to implement the Scottish Child Interview Model is, for most, the foundation for the development of Bairns' Hoose.

All of this work supports effective implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland and Bairns' Hoose is reflected in the Scottish Government's Keeping The Promise Implementation Plan.

Child Poverty

Tackling child poverty is one of the three key priorities identified in the Verity House Agreement and priority which cuts across many of the team's policy areas. The team is engaged in this area in a number of ways, including through feeding in and representing the views of Local Government in national policy discussions and development; highlighting and promoting the key role of council services in preventing and addressing poverty; collaborating with a range of key partners (such as Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, Scottish Government, and third and academic sector organisations)



through the National Partners Group; and supporting the Senior Management Team as they represent our councils at the senior-level Tackling Child Poverty Programme Board.

Care and Wellbeing

National Care Service – Children’s Services

In September 2022 the Scottish Government commissioned CELCIS to carry out research with the aim of gathering evidence to inform decision-making about how best to deliver children’s services in Scotland in light of the introduction of a National Care Service. The purpose of the research was to answer the question, “*What is needed to ensure that children, young people and families get the help they need, when they need it?*”

The CELCIS research consisted of four strands and a final concluding report, all of which have now been published.

The four strands are as follows. The reports in full can be accessed [on the CELCIS website](#):

- [Children Services Reform Research study: Rapid Evidence Review](#)
- [Case Studies of Transformational Reform Programmes](#)
- [Mapping Integration and Outcomes Across Scotland: A Statistical Analysis](#)
- [Scotland’s Children’s Services Landscape: The Views and Experiences of the Children’s Services Workforce](#)
- [Children’s Services Reform Research Concluding Report](#)

Negotiations continue between COSLA and the Scottish Government, both at a political and officer level, regarding the future delegation arrangements for children’s and justice social work services. COSLA Leaders have been clear that any decisions around delegation of services should be taken locally.

In parallel with negotiations on delegation, COSLA and Scottish Government officers are working collaboratively to assess the recommendations from the CELCIS research, outlined above, to determine improvement work to support improved outcomes for children and families, and support our invaluable workforce.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

COSLA and Scottish Government co-chair the Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health. This is the latest incarnation of joint work in this policy area, providing a focal point for policy work on children and young people's mental health. Work undertaken through this Board and its predecessors has spanned the provision of community-based mental health supports and services, working to support and improve staff training, crisis supports, neurodevelopmental supports, School Counselling and CAMHs. Community supports and services provided by Local Government, resulting from this work supported over 58,000 children, young people and family members in the first half of 2023.

Beyond the Board, COSLA works to ensure suitable funding is available where Local Government provides mental health and wellbeing support, that mental health policy meets the needs of our children and young people and reflects the local government position. Recent work has included the national Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Self Harm Strategy. We also work to ensure children and young people are considered across the implementation of our suicide prevention strategy, Creating Hope Together.

The Promise

The Promise was made in February 2020, following the conclusion of the Independent Care Review. The Promise, to Scotland's children, is that they will grow up loved, safe and respected. The Promise must be kept by 2030.

[Plan 21 – 24](#) was published in June 2021; the development of [Plan 24 – 30](#) is underway and will be published by June 2024. It will set out the actions that Scotland must take to ensure that The Promise is kept by 2030.

COSLA works across local government, with The Promise Scotland, the Scottish Government, the third sector and other important stakeholders. In 2022 a Local Government Programme Board for The Promise was established to monitor and drive the delivery and implementation of the actions required of Local Government to Keep The Promise. The Board is chaired by SOLACE and includes a wide range of professional associations and organisations across the Local Government family.

The Promise Policy Manager supports all 32 local authorities through networks and forums and links closely with organisations such as Social Work Scotland, Scotland Excel, the Scottish Government and The Promise Scotland to ensure Local Government's voice is represented.



Included in work to Keep The Promise is the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, Family Support, Youth Justice and Secure Care, Brothers and Sisters, Fostering and Kinship Care, Continuing Care and Children's Hearings.

Children's Hearings Redesign

The Promise- Plan 21 – 24 stated that by 2024 the Children's Hearings System will have gone through a redesign process. That redesign process brought together children and families, and organisations that hold the responsibility, the structures, processes and legislation that underpin the Children's Hearings system.

In August 2021, The Promise Scotland launched a Hearings System Working Group, chaired by former Sheriff David Mackie.

In May 2023 The Promise Scotland published '[Hearings for Children](#)', the final report of the Hearings System Working Group (HSWG), it contains 97 recommendations. The Scottish Government provided its [response](#) to the Hearings for Children report in December 2023.

As a result of the Hearings for Children report, a Children's Hearings Redesign Board has been established. It is jointly chaired by COSLA and Scottish Government officials and its membership includes the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Children's Hearings Scotland, and Social Work Scotland, represented by a Chief Social Work Officer. The Board is currently discussing its programme of work and updates will be provided to COSLA's Children and Young People Board and the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping The Promise later in the year.