



To: Audit, Risk, and Scrutiny Board

On: 19 January 2026

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Audit Scotland Briefing: Improving Care Experience – Delivering 'The Promise'

1. Summary

- 1.1. Audit Scotland publishes regular national reports covering matters related to local and national government. In October 2025 Audit Scotland published ['Improving care Experience - Delivering The Promise'](#).
 - 1.2. The report summarises the current situation of the implementation of 'The Promise' in Scotland and the challenges it faces.
 - 1.3. The Audit Scotland report calls for greater support and clarity from the Scottish Government to achieve the target of fully implementing The Promise by 2030.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Audit, Risk, and Scrutiny Board note the content of the Audit Scotland report and the implications for 'The Promise' within Renfrewshire Council.
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3. Background

- 3.1. In 2016, an independent review into the Scottish care system was commissioned by the Scottish Government. The Care Review published a series of reports in 2020 outlining the improvements required by 2030 to reach the aim of ensuring 'all young people grow up feeling loved, safe and respected, so that they can realise their full potential'. The Scottish Government's commitment to the findings of the Care Review is known as 'The Promise.'
- 3.2. The Scottish Government created three organisations to guide and monitor the implementation of 'The Promise.' These organisations are:
 - The Oversight Board – tasked with monitoring the progress of implementation of 'The Promise' and identifying areas that need more support. This Board is advisory and does not possess powers to enforce

changes. The Oversight Board membership is composed of at least 50% care experienced individuals.

- The Promise Scotland – created to develop the roadmap for ‘The Promise’ and to provide support to partner organisations. The organisation also assists the Oversight Board with the monitoring of progress. The Promise Scotland is designed to be dissolved in 2030.
- The Independent Strategic Adviser (ISA) – the First Minister appointed the Chair of the Care Review as an independent adviser in 2020. The role originally entailed being the Chair of both The Promise Scotland and the Oversight Board, advising civil servants, and liaising with Scottish Government ministers on the strategic position of ‘The Promise’. However, in 2024 the ISA stepped down as the Chair of the Oversight Board.

3.3. Delivery of ‘The Promise’ is the responsibility of the 32 Local Authorities and entities designated as ‘corporate parents’ such as the Health Boards, the Scottish Police Authority, and national children’s organisations.

4. Key Messages

Governance

- 4.1. Audit Scotland is critical of the amount of funding and resources that have been provided by the Scottish Government to support the implementation of ‘The Promise.’
- 4.2. The report highlights that the goals of the ‘Plan 21-24’ have not been fully implemented and that the plan lacked detail. Audit Scotland also highlights that the web-based format of the ‘Plan 24-30’ has made it difficult for partner organisations to use.
- 4.3. Audit Scotland argue that greater clarity and guidance is required from the Scottish Government on how ‘The Promise’ should be delivered. It acknowledges that The Promise Scotland are developing 25 ‘route maps’ as part of the Plan 24-30 and that these should be published by the end of 2025.
- 4.4. Audit Scotland reviewed a selection of the over 200 actions that the Scottish Government published as part of their implementation plan. The report found that there are key issues that may have contributed to confusion around roles and ownership.
- 4.5. They indicate that some partners do not have a clear understanding of their role in delivering ‘The Promise’. The report recommends that the Scottish Government need to take a more active role in enabling change by coordinating actions between partners and prioritising timescales. Audit Scotland states that

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Scottish ministers hold the responsibility for delivering 'The Promise' at a national level.

- 4.6. The report indicates that 'The Promise' is now integrated into the Scottish Government's public sector reform agenda and that a new integrated governance approach covers 'The Promise', Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF), and Early Child Development. However, Audit Scotland state that the Risk Potential Assessment was not completed until 2025, and the Promise Programme Board risk register was not updated until 2023.
- 4.7. Audit Scotland highlight the importance of including care experienced voices in the decision making and planning for 'The Promise'. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Scottish Government has worked with Barnardo's and Who Cares? Scotland to lead national engagement with local engagement ongoing through the Promise Champions Boards. However, the report indicates that the extent that care experienced views are integrated into 'The Promise' planning is inconsistent.

Data Reporting

- 4.8. The Report indicates that the Scottish Government did not adequately plan how progress of 'The Promise' would be measured. It highlights that many of the key aims are difficult to quantify and that this has contributed to the confusion regarding progress. It notes that even quantifiable indicators, such as a reduction in the number of children recorded as 'looked after,' lacks nuance and that many still face challenges.
- 4.9. Audit Scotland assert that the lack of national leadership resulted in insufficient national data gathering. While there is some local reporting through COSLA and the Oversight Board, the consistency of the data gathered is unreliable. Who Cares? Scotland's research found that the lack of consistency in reporting was a barrier to delivering progress.
- 4.10. The Report states that there have recently been positive developments in data reporting. The Promise Scotland produced a report, 'Keeping the Promise – A local perspective,' to provide a national progress update. There has also been ongoing work by the Scottish Government and partners to improve the quality of available data and to connect data held by different services to provide a more comprehensive understanding of progress.
- 4.11. In December 2024 the Promise Progress Framework (PPF) was established to provide implementation oversight of 'The Promise'. The framework is based on the ten vision statements of 'The Promise' and corresponding performance indicators. The PPF gathers national progress data as well as wider data to provide greater context. Audit Scotland state that while the PPF is a significant step forward, it still does not capture all the required information.

Resources

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- 4.12. The Audit Scotland report questions whether there are enough resources available to implement 'The Promise'. It states that the Scottish Government has not completed a strategic assessment of the required resources such as finances, workforce, and infrastructure. An initial investment plan was to be produced but was not actioned.
- 4.13. The Report states that £1.2 billion was spent by local authorities on care experience services in 2023/24, an increase of 1.2% from 2017/18. The Report notes that these figures may be underreported as there were issues with the Local Financial Returns (LFRs) around 1) changes to annual report categories and 2) LFRs not accounting for the proportion of general budgets spent on Care Experienced children and young people.
- 4.14. Audit Scotland argue that due to the numerous funding streams for 'The Promise', it can be difficult to properly track how much has been spent, or to adequately evaluate the outcomes. The main sources of funding for 'The Promise' come through the 'Whole Family Wellbeing' budget and the 'Children's Rights, Protection and Justice' budget. However, funds allocated to these budgets have been used to support other priorities such as the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry.
- 4.15. The Report indicates that many councils are now exploring how earlier intervention and targeted spending can improve outcomes for children and young people while also realising long-term cost savings. In 2021/22 the Scottish Government created the £500 million Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) to promote preventative work. In the first three years of the programme £148 million has been allocated—a figure that is lower initially projected; however, the Scottish Government have allowed funding to be rolled onto future years.
- 4.16. In 2024 the ISA worked to develop a strategic approach to investment with the aim of identifying areas that money could be invested in prevention and where corresponding savings could be made to facilitate more funding. The report argues that since the ISA conducted its research the Scottish Government have not provided support to progress its proposals.
- 4.17. Audit Scotland assert that it is too early to properly evaluate the long-term impact of the WFWF investment into prevention but that there are signs of early progress. However, they highlight that single-year funding allocations limit the potential scope of preventative work.
- 4.18. The Report reiterates the important role that the workforce has in facilitating 'The Promise' and the challenges that they face. Children's Services workers, Foster and Kinship carers, and third-party organisations are all facing pressure from increased workload and added constraints.

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- 4.19. Audit Scotland highlight that further support for the workforce is needed to continue to progress the aims 'The Promise'. The report states that there needs to be significant investment into staffing numbers and training, including trauma-informed training, to fully implement 'The Promise'.

Renfrewshire Perspective

- 4.20. The Audit Report's recommendations for Renfrewshire Council and other local authorities are directed through expectations placed on Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs). For Renfrewshire, this responsibility sits with Renfrewshire's Children's Services Partnership.
- 4.21. Over the next 12 months, CSPPs must demonstrate how they will meaningfully involve Care Experienced people in their planning processes, ensuring that their perspectives directly influence local decision-making. CSPPs are also expected to use Promise Plan 24–30 to strengthen shared accountability and clarify roles across all sectors contributing to delivery of The Promise. Local authorities, including Renfrewshire Council, are further required to identify and publish priority areas that will support delivery of The Promise through to 2030 and beyond. This includes outlining how their work will focus on prevention, early family support, and improved outcomes for Care Experienced children and young people. These expectations form the core of the Report's ask regarding governance, accountability, and long-term strategic planning.
- 4.22. Renfrewshire's governance and delivery arrangements are supported by dedicated leadership roles and strong partnership oversight. The Promise Manager provides strategic leadership for Renfrewshire's Children's Services Partnership, ensuring local plans align with national priorities and legislative developments, and coordinating multi-agency implementation across council services, the HSCP, education, and third-sector partners. Working alongside this, the Promise Ambassador supports teams to embed the voice of Care Experienced people in service design and improvement, and co-chairs the Supporting the Workforce workstream to strengthen employment pathways and staff capability. Oversight is provided by Renfrewshire's Promise Strategic Oversight Group, chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer. Bringing together senior leaders from the Council, HSCP, third sector, education, Promise Scotland and wider community planning partners. This Group meets three to four times annually to provide clear governance, monitor progress across workstreams, and ensure a cohesive, cross-sector approach to keeping The Promise.
- 4.23. Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire's Children's Services Partnership will meet the national requirements through the 'Keep The Promise in Renfrewshire Action Plan 2026–2029', which will be published in March 2026. The plan will provide a clear roadmap for delivery and will be shaped by the voices of children, young people, families, and communities, informed by learning from

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the Audit Scotland Report. The next three years will be critical in progressing towards the national goal of fully realising The Promise by 2030. Renfrewshire's contribution will be delivered through focused actions, collaborative leadership, and a culture that prioritises relationships and wellbeing, supported by sustained partnership working, long-term investment, and continuous improvement.

- 4.24. The 'Keep The Promise in Renfrewshire Action Plan 2026–2029' will guide the work of the Promise Team and partners across Renfrewshire. It will set out priorities, responsibilities, and measures of progress, translating aspiration into action through evidence-based decision-making and lived experience. Delivering The Promise represents both a programme of work and a cultural shift, challenging traditional systems, redefining roles, and creating services that are compassionate, inclusive, and responsive. The plan provides a framework to manage complexity, mitigate risks, and improve outcomes for children and families.
 - 4.25. Progress will be detailed in the upcoming 'Renfrewshire's Promise – Keeping The Promise Report', covering February 2025 to February 2026. This report will describe how Promise principles have been embedded across services, governance structures, and community-based initiatives, with Care Experienced voices central to decision-making. It will be presented to the Education and Children's Services Policy Board on 12 March 2026 before being shared more widely.
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5. Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – While Renfrewshire is not mentioned in the report reference is made to the need for additional funding and resources to implement 'The Promise'.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – While not mentioned in the report, Audit Scotland do highlight the need for more support for staff to meet the aims of 'The Promise'.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – None
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** – None: an equality impact assessment is not required for this report as it is a summary of a national report for noting only.
8. **Health & Safety** – None
9. **Procurement** – None
10. **Risk** – None
11. **Privacy Impact** – None
12. **Climate Risk** – None
13. **Children's Rights** – Renfrewshire's work on promoting the Promise is consistent with our responsibilities to promote children's rights under UNCRC.

14. Cosla Policy Position – None

List of Background Papers

Audit Scotland report: [Improving care experience: Delivering The Promise](#)

Author: Andrew Voysey, Policy Officer, andrew.voysey@renfrewshire.gov.uk