

Improving outcomes for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity: Joining the dots across key policy agendas

There are a number of key policy agendas that are part of a broader ambition to improve outcomes for people and communities across Scotland affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity, including:



[Child Poverty](#)



[Equally Safe](#)



[Implementing
UNCRC](#)



[National Trauma
Transformation
Programme](#)



[The Promise](#)



[Whole Family
Wellbeing
Funding](#)

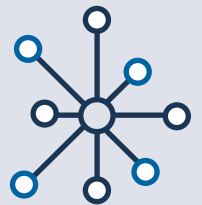
Our [previous briefing](#) explores how these policy agendas strengthen and support one another, identifies some common approaches to support local delivery and implementation, and considers what “good” looks like.

The Improvement Service supports a number of networks across these key policy agendas. This briefing highlights in more detail the links across these key policy agendas. It explores opportunities for re-framing these multiple policy ambitions not as competing, but as multiple opportunities to work together across departmental, service and organisational boundaries around the common goal of improving outcomes for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity.

KEY POINT: There are other policy agendas and programmes of work that haven't been referenced in this briefing which work to improve the outcomes for people and communities across Scotland affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity. These agendas can, and should, be incorporated into a collaborative working approach where possible to advance the shared goal of improving outcomes for people and communities.

JOINING THE DOTS

Taking account of the challenges and complexities of the current context, as well as the enablers of cross-cutting working, **how can we re-frame these multiple policy ambitions not as competing or siloed, but as multiple opportunities to work together around the common goal of improving outcomes for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity?**



All of these key policy agendas are pulling in the same direction.

They all have similar overarching goals and ambitions, including:

Improving social, economic and health and wellbeing outcomes and reducing inequalities for people and communities affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity, so that people can live the lives they choose.

Building public services and systems on a foundation of human rights for all, including children and young people.

Strengthening the way our public and third sector services and systems work together so that they're person centred, with professionals and people using services working together so that support is tailored to the needs of the individual and what matters to them.

continued →

JOINING THE DOTS cont.

Ensuring services and systems recognise the complexities and intersectionalities of experiences, impact and needs of people affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity.

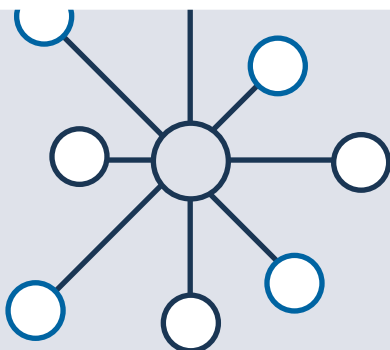
Strengthening the values base and culture of our public services and systems so that they are experienced as supportive resources by individuals and communities, and positive places to work.

Ensuring people can access the support they need, when they need it, across universal and specialist services, and across the life course, including identifying and responding to where there might be barriers to accessing support.

Shifting towards activities, investment and approaches that support prevention and early intervention.

Supporting the resilience of people, families and communities.

Shifting Scotland's attitudes and perceptions around poverty, trauma, adversity and gender-based violence to raise awareness and reduce stigma.



They all have a shared emphasis on key values and principles for service design and delivery:



Person centred



Rights based



Strengths based



Recognising and supporting people's resilience



Dignity, equality, respect



Safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment



Relationships



Nurture, care, support



Voice, participation and power sharing

KEY POINT: Evidence shows that people often experience multiple and intersecting inequalities, trauma and adversity. These experiences may also mean people are at higher risk of experiencing further inequality, trauma and adversity. For example, women are more likely to experience poverty because of economic inequality. Adults with care experience are more than twice as likely than peers with no care experience to have experienced homelessness. The [Hard Edges Scotland report](#) found that severe and multiple disadvantage experienced in adulthood, such as alcohol/ drug use, offending, homelessness, mental ill health and domestic abuse, often has roots in childhood trauma and adversity, estimating that 226,000 people in Scotland have experienced two of these disadvantages in their lives largely as a result of earlier trauma.

Because of these multiple and intersecting inequalities and experiences of trauma and adversity, we know that our work across these key policy agendas is designed to improve outcomes often for the same people, families and communities.

WHAT IS CROSS-CUTTING WORKING?

Cross-cutting working can mean different things, including:



Joined-up working across services, organisations and systems, strategically and operationally



Joining up policies, strategic planning processes and financial decisions within and across services/ organisations



Moving out of “vertical” siloes created by policies, service/organisational boundaries, funding streams and reporting requirements, and horizontally cutting across these by focusing on the wider shared ambitions and intended outcomes of a group of policy agendas

Research: Wicked Problems



Design theorists [Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber](#) introduced the term “wicked problem” to draw attention to the complexities and challenges of addressing planning and social policy problems.

They highlighted how complex issues, such as education policy and public health, are wicked problems; they cannot be articulated nor solved in a way that is straightforward, simple or final. In addition, these issues are all intertwined with each other and we need to learn how to reframe the issues entirely in order to come up with potential solutions.

Therefore, there cannot be one singular resolution to all of these ‘wicked problems’; however, understanding how components of the system correspond with each other and working with agility and collaboration can help those designing and developing services to tackle wicked problems more effectively ([Wong, 2023](#)).

WHAT CAN CROSS-CUTTING WORKING HELP US TO DO?

Recognise that the challenges we face in tackling and eradicating poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity can't be fixed by one team, department, policy area or practice approach. People’s lives are complex and they often experience multiple challenges and inequalities which cannot be solved by partners working in isolation. These challenges “rarely fit neatly into the siloed structures of government”. They require a systems approach and [working collaboratively across teams, services and policy areas](#).

Recognise that “There is no silver bullet, model, pilot or innovation that can fix systemic challenges. [Shifting systems](#) requires multiple transformative innovations at different times and levels in the system – many of which can only be maximised by being interdependent”. While these key policy agendas may be focused on specific services or parts of the system, they are all pulling in the same direction of ultimately improving outcomes for people and communities across Scotland affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity.

Work within and navigate complexity. Each of these key policy agendas is “bound together and interconnected” with the others. For example, we can’t tackle and eradicate child poverty without tackling and eradicating women’s inequality and the unacceptable levels of violence, abuse and exploitation experienced by women, children and young people. We can’t deliver The Promise if we don’t have trauma-informed and responsive services, systems and workforces. [Understanding this complexity](#) can enable each of us working in different policy areas to “understand the contribution [we] can make to tackling issues that have previously been seen as ‘belonging’ to another part” of the organisation or system.

Explore new and creative ways to pool capacity and resources, find opportunities to reduce duplication and strengthen collaboration by identifying where work within one policy agenda supports the delivery of another policy agenda.

Find allies, build coalitions and strengthen supportive relationships. “Diverse and strong relationships are also crucial to the quality of ideas that emerge. Relationships with people across the system will keep you on course towards a shared goal and purpose.” Doing so can help us recognise that we’re not alone, we’re all working within a challenging context and we can [be a supportive resource for each other](#).

Ask different kinds of questions. If we work with this complexity, across multiple different policy areas, with a diversity of people across the system, we’ll see the challenges from a broader, systems-

wide perspective, rather than solely within our own service, department or policy area. For example, we might shift from asking “How do we improve our specific service?” (which tackles the symptoms and may bring about some limited improvements to a specific service) to “Why, in our local area, are people affected by poverty, inequality, trauma and adversity experiencing poorer outcomes and what kind of systems do we need to change this?” (which helps look at fundamental structures and patterns that are causing the challenge, and the [role all teams/services/organisations have to play](#) in change processes).

CHALLENGES IN JOINING THE DOTS



All of these “policy agendas are the work, not additional to the work we do.”
(Participant, Peer Support Network, 2024)

“As welcome as many of these targets, duties and policy agendas are, there is a risk that each is seen as separate, and that activity within each becomes siloed within government and across Scotland.”

While all of the policy agendas listed above set out clear ambitions to improve outcomes for specific groups of people and communities across Scotland, there is a risk that if they are seen as additional or competing priorities that partners are working to, then this can place increased pressures on workforces and act as a barrier to creating person-centred systems and services. These risks can be exacerbated by other challenges, such as:

A complex policy landscape where policies feel disjointed and siloed, at national and local levels

Funding for implementation is often short-term and for specific agendas, which makes local long-term planning around joined-up working challenging

Constraints around capacity and resource makes it difficult for managers and practitioners to engage with multiple policy agendas and be aware of what’s happening locally across multiple agendas, and understand the role they have to play

Some agendas **run the risk of becoming a “tick box” exercise** and having limited impact

Given the range and complexity of policy agendas, it’s often **difficult for senior leaders to prioritise all of them**

Policy agendas can often feel like **“flavour of the month”** but we need time to understand and evaluate “what works”

This additional infographic provides an overview of these key policy agendas, highlighting the commonalities across these agendas/ strategies’ visions, key principles, priorities and intended long-term outcomes.

CREATING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED, COLLABORATIVE, JOINED-UP, PERSON-CENTRED WORKING

Each local authority and their partners will develop their own unique approach to taking these strategic agendas forward. The [previous briefing](#) included questions to help to align agendas and find a coherent approach across your work. The questions below build on those and may help with initial discussions around collaborative, joined-up, person-centred working:



- ✔ Recognising that we are all working within similar constraints and challenges (e.g., capacity, resources), how can we understand what this means for our work and how can we navigate complexity and challenge together?
- ✔ What is our shared definition of collaborative, joined-up, person-centred working across these policy areas in our local area?
- ✔ What are some of the conditions that are needed to support collaborative, joined-up, person-centred working across these policy agendas in our local area?
- ✔ What would positive and productive collaborative, joined-up, person-centred working look and feel like in our local area across these policy agendas? How would we know this is working?
- ✔ What might some of the co-benefits be when implementing these policy agendas? E.g., what is the impact of implementing one policy agenda on another policy agenda?
- ✔ Where is a collaborative, joined-up, person-centred approach working well? What are our strengths in our local area? Where are the opportunities for improvement? What do we want more of and what do we want less of?
- ✔ What are some of the barriers and enablers to collaborative, joined-up, person-centred working in our local area across these policy agendas? Why might this be the case?

Useful resources

[Tackling Inequalities, Trauma and Adversity across the Lifespan: Mapping Cross-Cutting Agendas – briefing](#) (Improvement Service, 2022)

If you'd like more information on how the IS is able to support your local authority with this work, please get in touch: trauma@improvementservice.org.uk