

The Promise – the report of the Independent Care Review

Change Programme

The [Independent Care Review](#) promised a ‘root and branch’ review of the care system for looked after children, driven by those with experience of it. Its report, called [The Promise](#) published in February 2020 makes commitments to children and young people which it aims to deliver by 2030. The Care Review wants to transform the whole system so that the primary purpose is changed from protecting against harm to “protecting all safe, loving respectful relationships”. It aims to create a system where:

- children are listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care;
- families receive the support they need to stay together, including long term;
- where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home;
- children must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.
- children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. Help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

Achieving this will require significant changes to the way that UNISON members in social work are required to practice. The new [National Practice Guidance on Siblings](#), for example, already places extra pressures on children and families social workers.

The Promise presents an opportunity to return to a radical social work based upon relationship based and needs based practice. However social work has moved away from that over the years with a greater focus on managerialism and bureaucracy. If we are to implement the Promise in full then we need a significant culture change in how social work is managed and delivered and the investment of *significant* extra resources by Government.

What’s happening?

An arms-length company called The Promise has been created by the Scottish Government to oversee the implementation and delivery of these changes by local authorities, the third sector, the regulatory bodies, and other key agencies. Involvement of individuals with experience of the care system is a key principle. There is a national Oversight Board, of which half the members have personal experience of being looked after as a child.

Local Oversight Boards are being created to oversee change in each area of Scotland.

How The Promise reforms will be achieved is laid out in:

[A Plan of Work for 2021 - 2024](#) sets out five priority areas with actions and targets.

[A Change Programme](#) – outlines how change will be achieved over a 10-year period.

[Individual reports](#) – setting out what needs to happen in both adult and children’s services including in adult health & social care, criminal justice & addictions as well as in children’s social care, family support, secure care, residential, youth justice, the children’s hearings system and inspection and regulation.

Key Proposed Changes

Governance - A new model of governance and accountability for children and family services is promised **by autumn 2021**, ‘to enable the improved use of money in the delivery of redesigned services’. The [Independent Review of Adult Social Care](#) (the ‘Feeley Review’) consulted closely with The Promise when considering its recommendations. Whether children’s social care will be included in the plans for a National Care Service will become clear when the [government consultation](#) launches on 8 August 2021.

Money – the emphasis is on ‘using existing money differently’: shifting money ‘upstream’, away from crisis response and towards prevention. Of course, this has been the aim in Scotland for decades and was what Integrated Joint Boards were set up to do. The Change Programme says it will identify and break down perceived barriers to using the money differently including governance, accountability and scrutiny systems. Organisations can bid competitively for short-term project funding to support implementation of The Promise; so far 68 awards of £50k have been made with some local authorities using this money to fund an implementation officer post.

Redesigning services and service delivery with the involvement of people with care experience. Dundee, Fife and Shetland Islands Councils and Inverclyde HSCP [have been awarded £140k-£200k](#) to support redesign of their services. The charity Aberlour has been funded to redesign its children and families services nationwide.

Workforce

- A national values-based recruitment and workforce development framework will be put in place and adhered to by all organisations and professions involved in supporting children and their families.
- National workforce planning around services and support for children, young people and families will be established aimed at delivering the outcomes in The Promise and implementation of UNCRC.
- SSSC will review all codes of practice to provide a framework to uphold a rights and relationships-based approach.

To support this the Government has committed to a national roll out of trauma training for social workers beginning in June 2021, developments to social work qualifying programmes to equip the future workforce to deliver The Promise; and work with SSSC and Social Work Scotland (SWS) to ensure the workforce is supported with the right skills and development to support care experienced individuals.

Key action points for branches

Workforce voice

Workforce voice is **ignored** in the Change Programme. Branches are encouraged to initiate local discussions with employers about how The Promise will be implemented locally. Branches should try to ensure trade union representation on the Local Oversight Boards which are being set up.

Workload pressures

Transforming social work practice can only be achieved if we address the twin burdens of workload pressures and managerialism. The relationship-based practice which children and families have asked for cannot be provided without this. We need to push back on workload and put pressure on employers to meet their legal duties on the management of workplace stress, making use of the [HSE Stress Management Standards](#).

Arguing for investment

If the commitment being made to children and young people holds true then The Promise presents a huge opportunity to address the crisis of underfunding in children's and adult services. The improvements which have been promised to children and young people cannot be delivered without this. The Promise Change Programme tries to body swerve the question of funding by focusing on service design and structural reform – UNISON branches must keep on making the case for proper investment in services.

Get organised – join SWIG

UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group (SWIG) is coordinating bargaining and campaigning activities around the implementation of The Promise. If you work in children and families services then please get involved – contact your branch secretary and ask to be nominated for the Social Work Issues Group and added to our circulation list.

What's Next?

The Social Work Issues Group is conducting a survey of Children & Families Social Work staff during August 2021. We want to find out what our members need to ensure that they can practice in a way that delivers for our looked after children.

If the Promise is really to deliver in the way that care experienced children and adults have asked for, this is about taking a long hard look at what 10 years of austerity has done to our social work services and to repair that damage so that our members can provide the kind of service they all want to provide with the time and resources that they need.

If you are a children and families social worker or support worker please watch out for the survey and encourage your colleagues to take it.

For further information please contact s.galloway@unison.co.uk

