



# A SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM BUILT ON PREVENTION



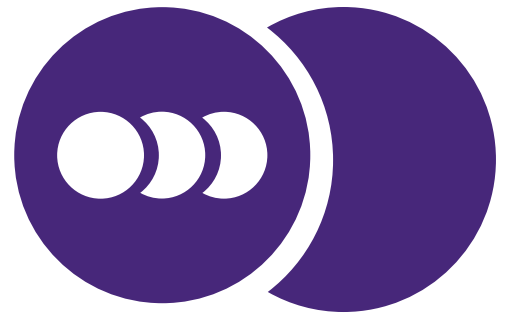
*Local Government's Call for Change*

Strong communities start



with Local Government

## OUR STARTING POINT



Scotland's social care system is at a crossroads. Demand is rising, demographics are shifting, and public services face unprecedented financial pressure. COSLA and Local Government leaders recognise that the sector is stuck in a cycle of short term responses and crisis driven delivery, rather than long term planning with communities at the centre.

A thriving Scotland starts with a decisive shift to prevention, early intervention, and accessible support for our communities. Only through this shift can Scotland build a social care system that consistently meets people's needs, supports independence, and improves outcomes across the life course.

However, nearly fifteen years on from the Christie Commission, the change required has not been realised and, instead, the system has been subject to successive and complex layers of national policy and structural reform, without the sustained focus on empowering and resourcing Local Government to support people to live well and independently in their own communities.



# PREVENTION AT THE HEART OF SOCIAL CARE REFORM



**A preventative approach is a whole-system, place-based way of working that focuses on the social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape people’s wellbeing. It means investing in early intervention, supporting community resilience, and redesigning services to reduce avoidable demand—not just avoiding ill-health. At its core, a preventative approach is about creating the conditions for people and places to thrive by addressing the underlying drivers of inequality and poor outcomes. By shifting effort upstream, councils can improve long-term outcomes for residents, strengthen local capacity, and reduce reliance on high-cost crisis services.**

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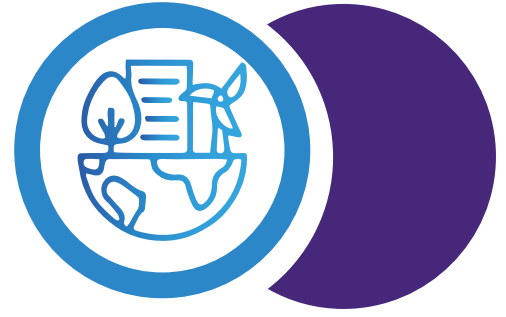
Local government is uniquely placed to shape the places and communities in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age, and plays a vital role in supporting the health and wellbeing of Scotland’s people. The services delivered by local government are critical to creating the conditions for people to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives and help to strengthen the building blocks of health.

The Population Health Framework and Service Renewal Framework have prevention at the forefront of reform – but effective reform of our health and social care system must meaningfully embed this across public life.

Investment in social care is fundamental to realising Scotland’s prevention agenda. Preventative support is not an abstract concept; it is the infrastructure of assets, supports, partnerships, and services that enable people to maintain independence, wellbeing and connection long before crisis occurs. These forms of support reduce avoidable hospital admissions and help to ensure people are able to access the right support at the right time, while strengthening resilience at individual and community level. Underinvestment in local government and social care forces the system to react at the point of crisis, undermining prevention across all public services.

If social care is properly resourced, it becomes a cornerstone of prevention—bridging housing, health, community services and families to support people earlier, for longer, and in the places they call home.

# OUR VISION



Through properly embedding prevention across our communities, Local Government will deliver a social care system that:



Is genuinely **whole-system**, fully integrating health and social care while championing parity between them.



Prioritises and promotes **human rights** and the wellbeing of people and communities.



**Values and empowers its workforce**, supporting the workforce to know when and how to draw upon **innovative solutions**, such as digital and technology.



Ensures **local flexibility**, while ensuring high-quality care and positive outcomes for all.

The following sections outline our vision for achieving a preventative system – the steps we believe need to be taken in order to deliver this vision.



1

## Rebalance Scotland's Investment Towards Prevention

Funding structures shape behaviour. Today, ringfenced and short term funding limits Local Government's ability to plan for long term needs of our communities. We call for a fairer, flexible and sustainable funding settlement that enables councils to prioritise prevention, early intervention, and community wellbeing supported by digital technology and innovation. We know this will take significant investment which is why we called for an additional £750m for social care in the 26/27 Scottish Budget to reflect the scale of change required, including addressing existing levels of unmet need, investing in community and grassroots organisations, and enabling prevention-focused service redesign.

This means:

- Ensuring that local services, including our third sector partners, have stable, multi-year funding arrangements, rather than relying on short-term annual budgets, so they can plan effectively and invest in long-term preventative approaches.
- Embedding a preventative investment mindset across all of the public sector—supported by fair and sustainable funding—so councils can prioritise early action and long-term outcomes across the full range of local services.

## OUR ASK



**That the next Scottish Government enable a shift of resources into prevention—and Local Government will lead the way in deploying them effectively. This includes supporting and enabling the Scottish public sector to harness digital technology and innovation.**

2

## Redefine the Social Contract with Scotland's Communities

A sustainable preventative system requires honest dialogue with the public about the reality of demand, funding pressures, and responsibility.

Current perceptions create frustration when people don't experience what they rightly expect. COSLA calls for a system that empowers people to plan for their own care, and to understand the complexities – and the constraints – that exist across the system.

This means:

- Engaging in a national conversation about how we effectively realise rights and ensure this is matched by available resources.

## OUR ASK



That the next Scottish Government continue to work with Local Government to progress public service and wider health and social care system reform, alongside transparent engagement with the public on the opportunities and constraints facing the system, to support a renewed, coherent, and sustainable social partnership.

### 3

## Shape a Care System Built Around Communities

Wellbeing starts where people live.

Social care is increasingly delivered at home or in home-like community settings. Housing is one of the most powerful preventative tools available to Local Government, and the communities we live and spend time in are strongly connected to the informal and formal support that individuals benefit from.

Councils know their communities best whether they are urban, rural or island. If we want real transformation and positive outcomes for our communities, councils need the powers and resource to support place-based decisions and deliver homes where they are needed most locally. That is why COSLA has also [called on](#) the next Scottish Government to take bold action to address the housing emergency.

This means:

- Partnership working with Scottish Government, housing, and care providers to ensure the market is equipped to meet current and future need, so that people with support needs – no matter how complex – can live well at home and in a home-like setting, with good support and social connections.
- Ensuring all people can access the care they need, including through digital technology, with services and tools that communicate to each across in an integrated, seamless, whole system way.

## OUR ASK



That the next Scottish Government continue to work with us to deliver our shared commitments in the Coming Home Action Plan, and recognise the significant pace and investment that is needed to ensure that individuals with complex needs and learning disabilities don't spend any more time than is necessary away from their home, support, and their social connections. There must also be a continued focus on improving the use of, and access to, digital capabilities in an ethical and equitable way across health and social care.

# 4

## Value, Develop and Sustain the Workforce that Delivers Prevention

Scotland faces significant workforce shortages, particularly in social care and social work, that risks undermining our shared ambitions for a Scotland where people live healthier, longer lives.

Prevention relies on a skilled, supported workforce that is adequately resourced, empowered, and afforded the time required to operate confidently and effectively in delivering high-quality support.

This means:

- Recognition that a truly preventative system requires a workforce empowered to intervene early, build relationships, and support independence.
- Strengthened succession planning, learning and development, and workforce wellbeing.

### OUR ASK



**That the next Scottish Government commits to fair, multi-year funding that enables councils to shift more people and resources into community-based, preventative work—so early intervention becomes the core business of how we serve our communities, not an optional extra.**



# HOW WE WILL WORK



To realise this shift, Local Government commits to:



**Regular engagement**  
to maintain  
accountability and  
shared purpose.



**Shared ownership**  
across all professional  
associations.



**Action-focused collaboration,**  
creating the capacity for  
system change.



**Alignment on common priorities**  
to reduce fragmentation and  
support whole-system prevention.

## Our Call to the Next Scottish Government

Prevention is the foundation of a sustainable future. If Local Government is properly empowered and resourced to deliver a prevention-focused system, we will be well placed to deliver a social care system that meets growing need while protecting and promoting people's rights.

By rebalancing resources, redesigning services, and supporting our workforce, we can build a social care system that is fair, sustainable, and rooted in the strength and place of Scotland's communities.

With the right conditions Local Government can lead this shift.

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