

Transforming support for children and young people with communication needs in Scotland: A partnership approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents a shared vision and set of practical recommendations for improving how services across Scotland support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). It has been developed through a collaborative round table co-chaired by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), and includes input from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Scottish Directors of Allied Health Professions (SDAHP), and the Scottish Children's Speech and Language Therapy Leads Network.



Scottish Directors
of AHPS (SDAHP)



WHY THIS MATTERS

There is a clear and growing need. More children in Scotland are presenting with communication needs, particularly in the early years. These needs are linked to a wide range of outcomes, from learning and wellbeing to employment and justice involvement. Supporting children's communication development is fundamental to achieving inclusion, equity and human rights.

THE CHALLENGE

Local services are under pressure. Some variability in provision should be expected, given the wide range of needs across the country, however there are significant complexities across Scotland regarding service models, funding agreements and levels of integration. Strengthening collaboration offers an opportunity to build on local strengths, share learning and work together to improve outcomes for all children.

OUR SHARED RESPONSE

This paper sets out two connected aims:

1. To identify principles for transforming services for children and young people with communication needs in Scotland.
2. To develop principles for sustainable partnership resource agreements between health and education that can support this transformation.

The group identified six key principles for transformation:

1. **Prevention** – focus on early intervention and reducing harm
2. **Outcome focus** – shared accountability for what matters to children
3. **Integrated practice** – enabling teams to work across organisational boundaries
4. **Sustainable funding** – aligning investment with need and long-term planning
5. **True collaboration** – building trust through transparency and joint decision-making
6. **The best service for the most in need** – ensuring support reaches the most vulnerable

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PAPER

- A summary of the national policy context
- Six principles for transformation of services to meet the needs of children and young people
- Six principles for developing sustainable partnership resource agreements
- Practical case studies from South Ayrshire, Angus and Forth Valley
- Recommendations to support transformation through local planning and commissioning

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

This paper is offered as a foundation for wider dialogue, shared learning and practical action. It supports the work of those leading local children's services to improve outcomes for children with communication needs by strengthening how we work together and how we invest.

