

# Children and young people's mental health: Update

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**1.** At the June Commission meeting, following the work programme update and the Secretary's update report, Commission members flagged the number of reports which highlighted ongoing issues with children and young people's mental health services and asked whether there is more the Commission and the Auditor General need to do in this area.<sup>1</sup> During the discussion that followed, Commission members suggested that it would be helpful to better understand what else is being done by other bodies and commentators before we decide to do anything further as there is a risk of duplication of effort. It would be important to be clear about what added value there would be in the Commission and the Auditor General doing further work in this area, at this time.

**2.** The Accounts Commission and Auditor General published a report on [Children and young people's mental health](#) in September 2018. The purpose of this paper is to update the Accounts Commission on further scrutiny of, and other developments in, children and young people's mental health services since the publication of this report.

**3.** Our 2018 report examined children and young people's mental health services in Scotland. The report looked at the accessibility of services, the support offered to children and young people, the resources supporting these services (including funding and the workforce) and the Scottish Government's policy and strategic direction. The report concluded that mental health services for children and young people in Scotland were under "significant pressure". Key findings from our report included:

- The system is complex and fragmented, and access to services varies throughout the country.
- The current system makes it difficult for children, young people, and their families and carers to get the support they need.
- A need for funding to be directed towards early intervention and prevention, whilst also balancing the need for specialist and acute services.
- A need for effective multi-agency working between specialist Children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), primary care, social work, schools and the voluntary sector.

<sup>1</sup> The SPICe briefing; the Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee an inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland; The Promise Scotland Oversight Board's first report; the Education Scotland report examining a range of approaches taken to support improvement and recovery.

[Appendix 1](#) provides a summary of Scottish Government's assessment of the progress it is making with the recommendations in our report.

4. On 24 May 2022, SPICe published a [briefing](#) on Children and Young People's mental health. This briefing provides a good overview of developments in children and young people's mental health services, since the publication of our 2018 report. It covers both the universal and specialist levels of support available in Scotland.

5. Both alongside and since the publication of our 2018 report, a range of further, ongoing scrutiny has taken place:

- The Scottish Government commissioned an audit of CAMHS rejected referrals. The Scottish Government asked the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) and Information Services Division (ISD) Scotland (now Public Health Scotland) to carry out qualitative and quantitative work to examine referrals to CAMHS which were rejected. The [audit into rejected referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\)](#) was published in June 2018. The term 'rejected referrals' refers to referrals made to CAMHS Tier 2, 3, or 4 services that are not accepted for treatment. Concerns had been raised over the increasing number of rejected referrals, with our 2018 report highlighting that there had been a 24% increase in the number of referrals not accepted by specialist CAMHS in Scotland. The audit contained 29 recommendations, which the Scottish Government accepted in full.
- The Scottish Government and COSLA jointly commissioned the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce in June 2018. The Taskforce published a [Delivery Plan](#) in December 2018 and sought to "ensure that the mental health needs of children and young people receive the attention and priority agreed by the Government and COSLA" following our 2018 report and the SAMH/PHS audit on rejected referrals. The Taskforce made its [final recommendations](#) to the Scottish Government and COSLA on 4 July 2019. Delivery of the recommendations made by the Children and Young People's Taskforce was overseen by the [Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board](#), which was jointly chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA. The Board met for the first time in August 2019 and concluded in December 2020. [The Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board](#), chaired by COSLA and the Scottish Government, was formed to progress the aims of the Programme Board. It anticipates running until December 2022.
- The Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee (PAPLS) received oral and written evidence on our 2018 report, and published its [report on children and young people's mental health](#) in March 2019.
- The Public Petitions Committee received evidence in December 2016 for its consideration of PE01627: Consent for mental health treatment for people under 18 years of age. The evidence received highlighted "serious concerns about the experiences of young people seeking help for their mental health". In November 2018, the committee established an inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland. The inquiry

focused specifically on Tier 1 support. The Public Petitions Committee published its [report](#) in June 2020.

- The Parliament also has a Cross Party Group on Mental Health. In 2019, the group began a two-year long [inquiry into the Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#). While the group's remit covers all age groups, two of its reports ([Priorities for Prevention and Early Intervention](#) (June 2020) and [Priorities for Access to Treatment and Joined Up Accessible Services](#) (November 2020)) cover issues relating to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

**6.** On 31 August 2021, the Interim Controller of Audit and Interim Director of Performance Audit and Best Value published a [blog about children and young people's mental health services](#). The purpose of the blog was to comment on the limited progress that has been made since our report in 2018, the lack of overall improvement in waiting times and to bring renewed focus and attention to this subject. It highlighted that, ultimately, despite "significant investment", the situation in 2021 remains similar to the one outlined in 2018.

**7.** Following the publication of our blog, the Public Audit Committee held a roundtable [evidence](#) session on 7 October 2021 with a range of stakeholders about the provision of children and young people's mental health services in Scotland. After the roundtable session, the committee wrote to the Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director-General for Health and Social Care to ask for her views on:

- why there has been such a consistently poor picture of performance in meeting the Scottish Government standard, which pre-date the Covid-19 pandemic;
- the extent to which she is confident that the wide-ranging work being undertaken by the Scottish Government to support children and young people with their mental health will result in reduced waiting times across Scotland; and
- what work the Scottish Government is leading to share and promote any good practice that can be learned from.

Her response to the Committee can be found [here](#).

**8.** Since the publication of our 2021 blog, a range of further, ongoing scrutiny has taken place:

- The Health, Social Care, and Sport Committee recently undertook an inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland. Mental health, access to CAMHS and the importance of early intervention have been specific themes within the inquiry. The committee heard [evidence](#) regarding mental health and CAMHS during its meeting on 18 January 2022. On 13 May 2022 the committee [published](#) its inquiry report on the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Scotland.
- On 23 May 2022, The Promise Scotland Oversight Board published its first report on progress Scotland is making to keep the pledge, The Promise,

by 2030. The report found that although progress has been made, the pace and scale of change needs to increase. It identified that although there was clear commitment, there were issues of inconsistent accountability and incomplete data being available to help understand children's lives. Other areas lacking progress included mental health provision, the continued lack of mental health provision for children and young people, and lengthy waiting lists. The Oversight Board said it is aware of the work of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board, although it is very concerned about the wait for support for care-experienced children and young people.

- On 24 May 2022, Education Scotland [published](#) a national report examining a range of approaches taken to support improvement and recovery in establishments nominated by local authorities across Scotland in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report references a number of case studies across Scotland and acknowledges that supporting the wellbeing of children, young people and their families is a key priority that features in almost all recovery or improvement plans. Almost all establishments are providing increased levels of support to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

## Conclusion

**9.** The limited progress that has been made since our children and young people's mental health report in 2018 and the need for urgent action were the very issues that prompted Audit Scotland to prepare its blog in August 2021, along with the intention to bring renewed focus and attention to this subject.

**10.** As outlined in the blog, the Scottish Government has taken some action aimed at improving children and young people's mental health services. The foundations to support change have started to be put in place. But it is too soon to tell how well any of these steps are working or the difference they will make.

**11.** Appendix 1 provides a summary of Scottish Government's assessment of its progress with our 2018 report recommendations. It should be noted that we have not yet verified all aspects of their assessment. Our 2018 report is part of our project to pilot a new approach to monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the impact of our work and as part of this we will follow up progress with the recommendations in our report further.

**12.** We are seeing some progress being made against our recommendations but many of the issues that need to be addressed are complex and long-term therefore more time is needed before formal follow-up audit work should take place.

**13.** In the meantime, we will closely monitor the progress on the actions being taken by the Scottish Government and the wider system and this will help inform any future work we may wish to undertake on children and young people's mental health services. If we are concerned about the pace of change we will report publicly on that and/or start any proposed follow-up audit work sooner.

## Appendix 1: Recommendations to the Scottish Government from our 2018 report: Status update from the Scottish Government

Recommendation from 2018 report	Target Completion Date	Status Update by the Scottish Government
<p>The Scottish Government should act on the findings of current reviews and set clear timescales for when recommendations will be implemented. This includes: the scoping report into provision of a specialist inpatient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) unit for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism; the work on rejected referrals; and, the review of personal and social education (PSE), counselling and pastoral support in schools.</p>	Ongoing	<p><b>Status update:</b></p> <p>1. Following the Needs Assessment Report into specialist Learning Disability CAMHS services was published in 2017, NHS Lothian was selected to develop proposals for the 4-bed Adolescent Unit following a tendering process. This is scheduled to open in 2023/24 subject to national planning processes. The National Child Learning Disability Unit will be situated in the National Child Psychiatry Inpatient Unit in Glasgow and already admits children with learning disabilities and mental health disorders using its existing expertise and available capacity.</p> <p>2. To address issues raised in the Rejected Referrals Audit, a new community mental health and wellbeing framework was introduced in February 2021. We are currently rolling out a Community Mental Wellbeing Service for 5-24 years olds. All new supports are in place and we are providing a further £15m to support these services. Services include play and art based therapies, digital and text based services and enhanced support for young people and families waiting for CAMHS interventions.</p> <p><b>Outstanding actions:</b></p> <p>3. The implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Personal and Social Education has been impacted by the pandemic, with key partners in the delivery of the recommendations focusing on education recovery, as such the timescale to implement the recommendations has been pushed back.</p>

Recommendation from 2018 report	Target Completion Date	Status Update by the Scottish Government
<p>The Scottish Government should provide more support to NHS boards, councils and integration authorities to help them improve how they meet the needs of children and young people with mental health problems. This includes: improving the quality of nationally published financial data to build a comprehensive picture of spending by both councils and the NHS on children and young people's mental health across the whole system; building the evidence base on what works, particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention; and, providing support to share good practice, including implementation of the newly launched Transition Care Plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p><b>Status Update:</b></p> <p>Based on the recommendations of the Children and Young People's (CYP) Mental Health Taskforce, the Youth Commission on Mental Health, the Audit of Rejected Referrals and the Audit Scotland Report on CAMHS, the CYP Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing Programme Board oversaw the delivery of key deliverables relating to a whole system reform of the approach to children and young people's mental health. The Programme Board came to an end in December 2020 and a new Joint Delivery Board (JDB) has been established to continue taking forward key deliverables to improve CYP mental health. The first meeting of this Board was at the end of April 2021.</p> <p>The JDB deliverables include: Continuing to enhance community based support from emotional wellbeing/mental distress; ensure crisis support is available 24/7 to children and young people; support Mental Health pathways and services for vulnerable children and young people, aligned to the work of the Promise; Develop a support programme to enable the implementation of the CAMHS service specifications; agree and support the implementation of a neurodevelopmental service specification/principles and standards of care; work jointly with the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board to consider what is currently available and what is required in the future to support the mental health and wellbeing of 3-5 year olds across Scotland, and produce recommendations for further action, and develop a programme of education</p> <p><b>Outstanding Actions:</b></p> <p>Alongside this the Scottish Government is working with PHS, NES, Boards, IJBs and other partners to improve the tracking of investment in CYP mental health against performance and outcomes. As new community services are introduced, we are looking to develop effective financial monitoring arrangements for SG investment through CPPs.</p> <p>Additional investment in school and FHE counselling services and school nurses are also being tracked during the implementation.</p>



Recommendation from 2018 report	Target Completion Date	Status Update by the Scottish Government
<p>The Scottish Government should develop a long-term financial plan for improving mental health services for children and young people. This should be a strategic plan which improves transparency about how resources are used to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. It should include: the anticipated balance of spending across the whole system of mental health services for children and young people; a framework to support all partners to prioritise activity and spending on prevention and early intervention, while also meeting the need for acute and specialist services; and, modelling of future demand for services against workforce and training plans.</p>	Completed	<p><b>Status Update:</b></p> <p>Our Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan, published in October 2020, sets out our response to the mental health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, containing over 100 actions. The Plan is supported by a £120 million Recovery and Renewal fund, announced in February 2021. The Fund will transform services, with a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention.</p> <p>This year around £40m has been invested to improve the mental health care that children and young people receive through CAMHS, which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address CAMHS waiting times this year</li> <li>• Implement a CAMHS Service Level Specification, which sets out the levels of service that children, young people and families can expect from CAMHS across Scotland.</li> <li>• Improve community CAMHS, with an expansion from age 18 to age 25 for targeted groups, and those who wish it.</li> <li>• Provide access to out of hours assessments, intensive and specialist CAMHS services, which will benefit children and young people with complex needs, and their families, including in a home setting.</li> </ul> <p>We expect total spend, including by NHS Scotland, on mental health in 2021/22, to be in excess of £1.2 billion. We have also committed to increase the direct investment into mental health services by at least 25% and ensure that, by the end of the parliament, 10% of our frontline NHS budget will be invested in mental health services.</p>

Recommendation from 2018 report	Target Completion Date	Status Update by the Scottish Government
<p>The Scottish Government and COSLA should produce a joint plan for supporting improvement in services for children and young people with mental health problems, to be developed in partnership with all relevant Scottish Government portfolios and with integration authorities. This should include: specific actions with clear timescales to show how the system will improve to better meet the needs of children and young people; and, a clear framework to measure progress and support improvements in performance.</p>	Completed	<p><b>Status Update:</b></p> <p>The CYP Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board is providing support and coordination to improve CYP mental health. There is a Mental Health subgroup of the Children's services planning leads group. There is also an internal cross policy group which aims to coordinate CYP mental health across the portfolios.</p>
<p>The Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and their partners should work together to determine what performance and financial data should be collected and reported publicly, at both a national and local level. This should include measures of quality of care and outcomes for children and young people. This data should be used at a local level by delivery partners to better understand performance and inform decision-making about: how to target funding to best meet the needs of children and young people; the type and level of mental health and wellbeing services required locally; the size and skills of the workforce; and, which interventions have the most positive impact on children and young people.</p>	Ongoing	<p><b>Outstanding Actions:</b></p> <p>We are planning an exercise to commence this recommendation. Initial steps include activity across NHS Boards to better understand and respond to demand for clinical services; improving the quality and consistency of CAMHS data; improving alignment to SG funding through NHS boards and CPPs to services and outcomes; work led by NES on supporting the skills of the widest workforce; and data improvement in relation to workforce planning.</p>
<p>The Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and their partners should work together to routinely monitor the current balance of spending and activity at a local level on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing services, from prevention and early intervention to specialist services.</p>	Ongoing	<p><b>Outstanding Actions:</b></p> <p>The impact of Covid-19 on mental health services for children and young people is unclear at this stage. We anticipate that there will be increased pressure on resources and demand. This will need to be taken into consideration as the new community services are developed.</p>



Recommendation from 2018 report	Target Completion Date	Status Update by the Scottish Government
<p>The Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and their partners should work together to develop local plans for how the balance of spending and activity will be shifted towards early intervention and prevention over the longer term.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p><b>Outstanding Actions:</b></p> <p>The impact of Covid-19 on mental health services for children and young people is unclear at this stage. We anticipate that there will be increased pressure on resources and demand. This will need to be taken into consideration as the new community services are developed.</p>
<p>The Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS boards, councils, integration authorities and their partners should work together to review alternative models of children and young people's mental health services, and consider a coordinated approach to piloting alternative models. Any review should ensure a human rights-based approach is followed.</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p><b>Status Update:</b></p> <p>Following a multi-year collaborative and research based approach, Scottish Government and COSLA published the Children &amp; Young People's Community Mental Health Support and Services Framework and announced £15m funding to support the design and implementation of services. The Framework sets out the principles upon which new and enhanced community based services should be developed. Local authorities, through Community Planning Partnerships are currently rolling out services across Scotland.</p>