
Report To:	Social Work & Social Care Scrutiny Panel	Date:	26 August 2025
Report By:	Kate Rocks Chief Officer Inverclyde HSCP	Report No:	SWSCSP/48/2025/JH
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Subject:	Review of Social Work Governance and Assurance across Scotland		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 ☐ For Decision ☒ For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to advise the Social Work and Social Care Scrutiny Panel of the publication, by the Care Inspectorate, of the 'Review of Social Work Governance and Assurance across Scotland'.
- 1.3 The report was published in May 2025 and the review focussed on how well social work governance and assurance arrangements across Scotland support leaders to:
- ensure statutory duties are carried out safely and effectively;
 - enable social work staff to be supported, accountable and effective in their practice;
 - assist social work staff to uphold core social work values.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members of the Social Work and Social Care Scrutiny Panel are asked to:
- (i) note the findings of the national review and local improvement activity;
 - (ii) consider requesting an update report for a future meeting of the Panel.

**Kate Rocks
Chief Officer
Inverclyde HSCP**

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 The Care Inspectorate undertook a review of social work governance and assurance arrangements between June and November 2024 and considered the delivery of adults, children & families and justice social work services.

3.2 The report was published in May 2025 and can be found at the following link: [Review of social work governance and assurance across Scotland 2025](#). The report acknowledged the complex legislative and policy landscape within which social work services are planned, delivered and evaluated, including 43 pieces of legislation, in addition to national regulations, policy, guidance and directions. In addition, the report reflected the different approaches taken in local areas to the integration of health and social care services, delivered through Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) where 34% have all social work functions delegated (as is the model in Inverclyde), 44% have solely adult social work services delegated and 22% have justice social work delegated alongside adult services.

3.3 Furthermore, the review team recognised that social work and social care services are provided within the context of significant challenges including finance and workforce, demographic pressures, increasing demand and complexity, alongside the enduring impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

3.4 The review was undertaken remotely using the following methods:

- **document review:** including Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) annual reports, social work governance terms of reference, risk registers and improvement plans;
- **national staff survey:** frontline social workers, paraprofessionals and occupational therapists as well as first-line managers;
- **structured interviews and focus groups:** including all CSWOs and regional focus groups;
- **conversations** with eight Council Chief Executives.

3.5 The aims of the review were to:

- highlight how CSWOs and other social work leaders can influence governance and assurance;
- explore how social work values were upheld in practice;
- identify what is working well;
- recognise the challenges faced by local leaders and staff and where improvement is required;
- understand how social work staff understand and experience social work governance and practice.

3.6 The national perspective

Nationally, 3,935 frontline staff and first line managers responded to the staff survey and, alongside the document review and interviews/focus groups, the review identified several key messages, summarised in Figure 1, below:

Clarity, understanding and effectiveness of governance arrangements	1. Overall, social work leaders and managers worked effectively within often complicated governance arrangements. In most cases these arrangements were well understood by staff.
	2. Oversight and assurance were enhanced by dedicated 'social work governance boards' or their equivalent.
Role and influence of social work	3. Social work influence was at times more limited within health and social care partnerships where it had a less equal level of representation.

	4. The role of the chief social work officer was important in promoting and amplifying the voice of social work.
Social work values	5. Staff, managers and leaders felt confident to promote and uphold values within social work services. There was a strong belief in the importance of social work values to support ethical practice.
Assurance, oversight and the management of risk	6. Overall, social work assurance was mostly effective
	7. Social work services were managing significant levels of risk relating to financial and staffing resources. The impact of both of these risks was amplified in island and rural settings.
Arrangements to enable staff to be supported, accountable and effective	8. Overall staff felt supported to deliver effective services.
	9. Most social work staff benefitted from appropriate professional supervision arrangements and received learning and development opportunities which supported them to deliver their role.

Fig. 1: Summary of key messages

3.7 The report also noted some additional high-level messages for national consideration:

- Scotland's social work services were finding the ability to match supply with demand exacerbated by increased levels of complexity. This meant that social work was at risk of being unable to fulfil its statutory duties in some service areas.
- Staff were concerned that traditional relationship-based practice was being replaced by 'transactional' or 'episodic' engagement with people and children who use services. This was particularly the case within adult social work.
- A national approach is required to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis. Social work sustainability is particularly impacted by the enduring financial position. Change is needed to support the vital role of social work services.

3.8 The local perspective

As part of the participation of Inverclyde HSCP staff and practitioners in the review, surveys were completed by 110 frontline practitioners and managers (2.8% of the national total). Of these, 38% worked in children & families services, 24% in adult services, 15% in mental health services and 10% in alcohol & drug services, with the remainder from Justice and Disability Services. In addition, 52% of staff who responded were front line social workers, compared to 42% nationally.

3.9 From the analysis of local surveys, the following key messages were identified:

- Staff are confident in helping people access services.
- The organisation implements a range of interventions and approaches to which ensure people's rights are upheld.
- Staff feel less supported to undertake professional and legislative duties and more supported to take part in annual appraisal and learning/reflective practice.
- Staff are confident about raising concerns and risks with their line manager.
- Staff understand line management and reporting responsibilities to managers and leaders.

3.10 Furthermore, people felt supported to uphold social work values, there was a clear leadership vision to improve outcomes for people and there was a clear understanding of social work governance arrangements, as well as the ability to access specialist advice to identify and mitigate risk.

- 3.11 The local analysis also indicated that staff recruitment and retention had been challenging for first line managers, with subsequent impact on caseloads at times. In addition, staff and first line managers identified areas where they felt improvements could be made; these were focussed on training and development opportunities, the use of performance and quality improvement information to help staff carry out their duties safely, and feeling listened to by leaders and managers involved in improving services.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Many of the local findings echoed national findings, particularly around resource challenges, increased demand and complex needs and the need for staff to provide responsive interventions and support to the people they are working with.
- 4.2 The key messages from the national review and local findings have been shared with the HSCP extended management team. They will also be considered along with the results of the annual iMatter workforce survey (which is provided to the full HSCP workforce) which has been published within the last month, as part of work to strengthen our governance arrangements, staff wellbeing and learning and development approaches. These will also inform activity to deliver key actions within the HSCP Workforce Plan 2022–25, including ‘access to training opportunities which support staff personal and professional development and supports the delivery of high-quality services’, as well as ‘fostering workforce cultures, kind and compassionate leadership that supports wellbeing and positive workplaces’.
- 4.3 In addition, the fundamental importance of relationship-based practice is embedded in several redesign workstreams in children & families, homelessness and integrated adult services, whilst local work to address the impact of the national social worker recruitment challenge enabled most social worker vacancies to be filled since the start of the year, with continued investment in the ‘Grow our Own’ programme and financial support to final year MSc students joining the HSCP.
- 4.4 Finally, within the revised senior leadership arrangements implemented this year, the CSWO is developing a social work governance group which will augment existing governance arrangements, to ensure staff understand social work governance, how it informs and is reflected in the work of committees overseeing social work delivery and how social work is appropriately represented in other management and governance arrangements. This will build on the existing, well-established arrangements within Inverclyde and ensure the focus on delivering social work services reflects social work values and how performance information is used to develop services, manage risk and support staff wellbeing and development.
- 4.5 Members of the Social Work and Social Care Scrutiny Panel may therefore wish to request a report to a future meeting to provide an update on progress here.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		x
Legal/Risk		x
Human Resources		x
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	x	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing		x
Environmental & Sustainability		x
Data Protection		x

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

N/A

5.4 Human Resources

N/A

5.5 Strategic

Activity to strengthen social work governance and assurance processes will support the progression of the HSCP's strategic objectives.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
x	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Summarise any environmental / climate change impacts which relate to this report.

N/A

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
X	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 N/A

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.