

Embedding trauma-informed and responsive organisations, systems and workforces: Identifying current progress, impact and future priorities



Executive summary

The Scottish Government and COSLA have a shared ambition for a trauma-informed workforce and services across Scotland, capable of recognising where people are affected by trauma and adversity, that is able to respond in ways that prevent further harm and support recovery, and can address inequalities and improve life chances. To support this ambition, the Scottish Government has provided recurring additional funding to all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland since 2021/22, to support them to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across services, systems and workforces. The Improvement Service has worked with local and national partners to develop an annual survey and Learning Report to capture learning about progress and impact of the work happening to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across Scotland's organisations, services and workforces.

This executive summary provides an overview of the key messages, learning and recommendations highlighted in the [National Learning Report 2025](#), and demonstrates the progress local areas are making in embedding trauma-informed and responsive practice across their organisations, systems and workforces. It highlights the breadth and depth of activities undertaken by local areas to drive forward this work, the enablers and challenges to sustainable implementation, and the progress made towards achieving the short-term outcomes outlined in the [NTTP Logic Model](#).

Key messages

Despite being at different stages of implementation, local areas have made substantial progress in embedding a trauma-informed approach across their local areas, including across all nine key drivers of the [Roadmap for embedding trauma-informed and responsive change](#).



Many local areas are continuing to focus on early implementation activities and creating the right conditions for this work to progress meaningfully, safely and sustainably, including **developing leadership buy-in and commitment**; setting up appropriate strategic scaffolding; strengthening approaches to **support staff care, support and wellbeing**; and continuing the roll out of **training and support** for practitioners across different service areas to **embed learning into practice**.



In addition, many local areas are now also progressing to thinking about how to continue to **sustainably embed this work in service design and delivery** long term, including taking a **trauma-informed lens to policies and processes**; exploring opportunities to develop meaningful and safe **engagement opportunities for people with lived experience** of trauma; and creating local infrastructure for **knowledge exchange and implementation supports** to embed learning into practice.



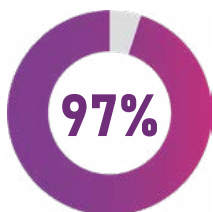
More broadly, local areas highlight the importance of **strengthening links with other cross-cutting policy agendas** to promote a joined-up, collaborative approach and embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach across all organisations, systems and workforces.

Progress and impact

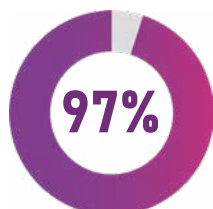
Local areas have identified encouraging evidence of early progress towards the short-term outcomes in the logic model. Out of the 29 local areas who responded to the survey:



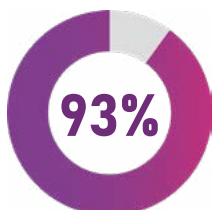
identified early signs/evidence that **staff are more likely to report increased knowledge and skills around the importance of collaboratively adjusting how they can work to take the impact of trauma into account and respond in a way that supports recovery, does no harm and recognises and supports people's resilience, relevant to their role and remit.**



identified early signs/evidence that **staff are more likely to report increased understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma on themselves and the people and communities they serve.**



identified early signs/evidence that **leaders at all levels are more likely to understand, drive, and inspire a trauma-informed approach across their sphere of influence.**



93% identified early signs/evidence that **services and systems are more likely to promote environments, relationships and ways of working that recognise the prevalence and impact of trauma.**



90% identified early signs/evidence that **staff are more likely to report that their wellbeing is valued and prioritised and that they have time and space to access relevant proactive and reactive support.**

“ There is **emerging evidence that staff are considering trauma informed approaches in their day-to-day work** and this can be **evidenced through reports completed in social work services such as with Justice colleagues and in Children & families using a Signs of Safety approach.** ”

“ The additional Trauma-Informed Practice training and support has had a **significant impact upon our service as we have embraced the opportunity to utilise the learning and create positive change as a result. The workforce are now more informed than they have ever been in relation to trauma (and the impact of trauma on behaviours) and are considerate of this in all dealings they have with people who use our services and with each other...** ”

Key activities and implementation

Local authorities and wider community planning partners, have been taking forward a breadth of activities to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across their systems, organisations and workforces. Reflecting that work to embed a trauma-informed approach is a journey, this section has been framed around the different stages of the trauma-informed journey namely: creating the right conditions; implementing change; and sustaining and consolidating change.

Creating the right conditions for trauma-informed and responsive change



Leadership and organisational culture

79% of local areas who responded to the survey have established a multi-agency steering group to provide leadership, oversight and support to establish links to other service areas, teams and policy agendas.



Staff care, support and wellbeing

Ensuring access to mental health first aiders and employee assistance programmes, promoting a calendar of wellbeing activities for staff to attend and engage in, highlighting the importance of self-care and wellbeing within staff training and developing a range of tools and resources to support staff across teams and service areas.

“ Trauma informed practice is named as a key thread through the Community Planning Partnership Plan, HSCP Strategic Partnership Plan, HSCP Workforce Strategy, Children’s Services Plan, amongst others. This ensures that [trauma] is not seen as a standalone piece of work but is integrated into the culture of the organisation. ”

Implementing change across our organisation and practice



Staff knowledge, skills, confidence and capacity

A number of local areas highlighted that they have incorporated trauma training into their local training and development calendars, with some areas making trauma-informed training a part of their induction process for new staff or included in mandatory training for all staff.



Power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma

Many local areas have set up lived experience parcels and steering groups to support with this and have highlighted lived experience reference groups already embedded within specific service areas to inform service design and delivery. In addition, some local areas have recruited people with lived experience to help inform the development and delivery of service provision.



Policies and processes

Many local areas have taken a trauma-informed lens to existing and new policies such as long-term absences and sexual harassment in the workplace, to ensure that trauma is considered when policies are developed and reviewed. Local Trauma Lead Officers highlight their role, often alongside the Trauma Steering Group where relevant, when working with a range of different services, teams and partners as part of policy development to ensure that policies are aligned with a trauma-informed approach.

“ Justice Social Work Services have employed a number of Justice support assistants with lived experience of the Justice system in order to (inform the development of) services we offer to people (accessing our service). The expertise and experience that this staff group bring has been a positive addition to all our teams and to those who utilise our services. ”

Sustaining and consolidating change across organisations, systems and practices



Feedback loops and continuous improvement

Local areas have developed specific processes to meaningfully engage with people with lived experience of trauma. This has included setting up new participation panels and focus groups, as well as refining and adapting existing structures to ensure they reflect trauma-informed principles and language



Service design and delivery

Many local areas are using the [Trauma-Informed Lens Walkthrough Tool](#) to apply a trauma-informed lens to the design and delivery of services. This process supports staff, managers and people who have experience trauma to collaboratively identify what they think the service is doing well and their improvements could be made.



Budget

Despite significant challenges around limited capacity, resource and funding, some local areas have highlighted how taking a collaborative approach, across different policy agendas and workstreams, has enabled progress in embedding trauma-informed and responsive practice across the workforce.

“ The Alcohol and Drug Recovery service completed a Trauma informed lens walkthrough within five sites with staff and paid members of their lived and living experience community in order to assess and improve services. ”

Enablers and barriers

There was broad consensus across local areas around what factors have enabled progress across their local areas over the course of 2024/25. In particular, local areas agreed that the **commitment from local services and practitioners and leadership buy-in** and **commitment to embedding trauma-informed change** are key factors in enabling progress.

Local areas agreed that staff turnover and recruitment challenges, a **lack of workforce wellbeing** supports and capacity to engage with this work, and uncertainty and/or **lack of appropriate funding** are barriers to long-term implementation and planning around the trauma agenda.



Commitment of local services and practitioners to engage with this work.

Leadership buy-in and organisational commitment to embedding trauma-informed change across the local area.

Additional Scottish Government funding to support this work.

Training and other implementation support from NTTP partners.

Trauma Lead Officer in post to lead on and coordinate this work.



Staff turnover and recruitment challenges.

Lack of workforce wellbeing and capacity.

Appropriate funding and resources to take forward this work locally.

Challenges around availability and access to appropriate training for staff.

Lack of leadership and/or organisational commitment to this work.



Recommendations and Looking Ahead



Creating the infrastructure, scaffolding and leadership needed to ensure long-term sustainability of the trauma agenda

Local areas have highlighted the usefulness of support available from various NTTP partners, including tailored and targeted support for priority service areas, for developing learning and building capacity across different sectors and policy areas. Similarly, dedicated roles, such as trauma leads and TPTICs, are incredibly valuable to progressing this work. However, given the scope of the ambition locally and nationally, it is not feasible for these roles alone to deliver on this. Instead, **the work to embed trauma-informed and responsive organisations, systems and services needs to be supported by local and national infrastructure** to support and sustain the changes that are happening in the long term.



Responding to the current context for the workforce and wider communities

Local areas continue to highlight the ongoing complexity and challenging context of this work in the public and third sectors. In particular, local areas highlight the range of competing demands placed on local authorities and community planning partners and increasing pressures on an already unstable public infrastructure and increasingly complex needs of both the workforce and communities. These challenges reaffirm the **importance of workforce wellbeing** and the need to **prioritise staff care, support and wellbeing** within local planning and decision-making.



Strengthening links to other cross-cutting policy agendas

A commitment to embedding a trauma-informed approach is increasingly embedded in national strategies, action plans, practice guidance, and some legislation. This covers a range of policy areas, and cross-cutting priorities where a trauma-informed approach is increasingly recognised as important. This highlights the need to continue to **ensure a trauma-informed approach is embedded in work to deliver on other national and local policies and priorities**.