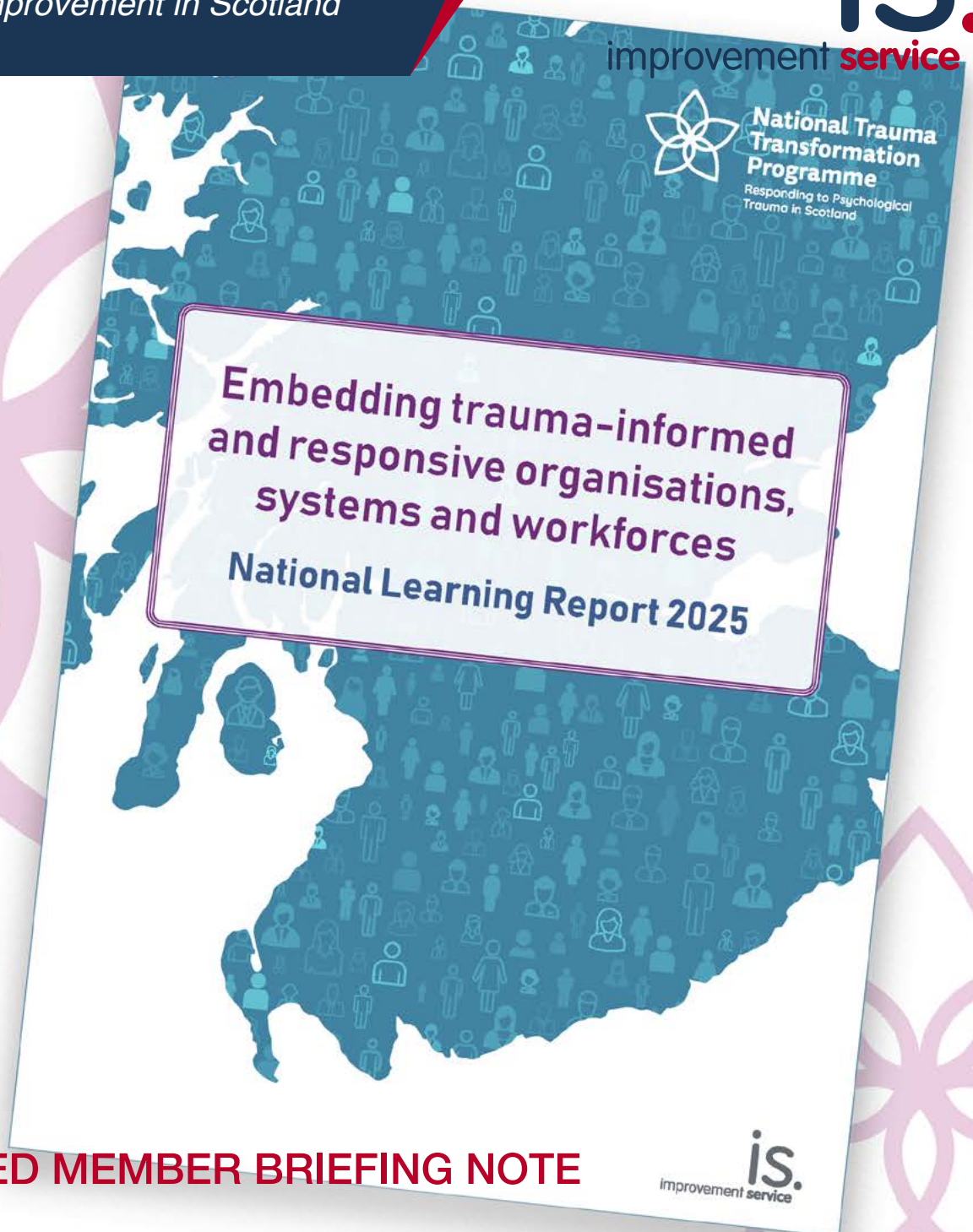


The 'go to' organisation for Local
Government improvement in Scotland

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ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

Embedding Trauma-informed and
Responsive Organisations, Systems
and Workforces

National Learning Report 2025



Elected Members Briefing Series

The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes are directly produced by IS staff but we also make available material from a wide range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. [All briefing notes](#) in the series can be accessed on the IS website.

About the Improvement Service

The Improvement Service (IS) is the go-to organisation for local government improvement in Scotland. Established in 2005, the IS supports councils and their partners to deliver better outcomes for communities, reduce inequalities, and achieve efficiencies.

We do this through leading transformation, building capacity and capability for improvement across the sector, supporting collaboration to tackle shared challenges, providing data and intelligence to inform policy and decision-making, and delivering national shared service applications and technology platforms.

Our expertise covers a wide range of areas including digital public services, performance measurement and benchmarking, transformation and change management, workforce and skills development, planning and place-based approaches, economy and employability, poverty and inequalities, and climate change.

For more information, visit our website: www.improvementservice.org.uk

About this briefing note

The Scottish Government and COSLA have a shared ambition for a trauma-informed workforce and services across Scotland. The [National Trauma Transformation Programme](#) (NTTP) is a major and long-term change programme, which aims to support this vision, and provides a wide range of learning resources, guidance and implementation support for all sectors of the workforce. The aim is to upskill staff, including leaders, to the appropriate level of trauma-informed and responsive practice and, critically, to embed and sustain this model of working.

In November 2025, the Improvement Service (IS) published a [national survey and learning report](#) to capture learning about progress and impact of the work to embed a

trauma-informed and responsive approach across the 32 Scottish local authorities and their key community planning partners.

This briefing will provide an overview of some of the key learning about enablers, barriers, and recommendations from the report and consider the role of elected members in developing a trauma-informed workforce in their local authority.



Key messages

As highlighted in the learning report, although 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](#). The report identified key recommendations in progressing this work, including adopting a long-term, cross policy approach, raising awareness of how trauma-informed practice is a public health issue, and strengthening links between this work and other key policy areas in tackling adversity and inequality.

There was broad consensus across the 29 local areas who responded to the survey around what factors had enabled progress across their local areas over the course of 2024/25. Although progress is likely the result of a combination of factors, including some not covered in the survey, in particular local areas agreed that the following have been key to supporting progress:

- ▶ Commitment from local services and practitioners.
- ▶ Leadership buy-in and commitment.
- ▶ Funding and implementation support from the NTPP.

Whilst the vast majority of local areas had identified early evidence that leaders are more likely to understand, drive and inspire a trauma-informed approach across their sphere of influence, it is clear that there is still work to do to ensure that there is consistent and sustainable leadership buy-in to this agenda across all systems, organisations and workforces.

A commitment to implementing a trauma-informed approach is increasingly embedded in national strategies, action plans, practice guidance, and some legislation. This covers a range of policy areas where a trauma-informed approach is recognised as important to delivering many local and national priorities.

It is reinforced by existing legislation such as Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act (2007), Equality Act (2010), Victims, Witness and Criminal Justice Reform Act (2025), and Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.



What is the issue and why does it matter?

Traumatic experiences affect most people at some stage in life, yet we often won't know about people's experiences, and the impact of trauma is unique to each of us. Trauma has consistently been associated with poorer outcomes across a wide range of areas including preventable disease, mental health, education, social outcomes, and many more. A trauma-informed approach can help us recognise the impact trauma may be having on the people who access and deliver our services and respond in a way that supports recovery and prevents further harm and improving outcomes for individuals and communities.

The very nature of trauma means that we often don't tell people about what has happened to us, and it is likely underreported. Nonetheless, 1 in 7 people in Scotland report experiencing four or more adverse traumatic experiences during childhood.

The prevalence of traumatic experiences means that trauma will inevitably impact many of those within our workforce, whether through personal experiences or through the work we do. This is particularly important for those of us directly supporting people experiencing trauma and highlights the importance of investing in trauma-informed staff care, support, and wellbeing to promote recovery, and resist re-traumatisation within the workforce.

Scotland has paved the way in recognising that a trauma-informed and responsive approach is crucial to ensuring all children, young people and adults can lead healthy and fulfilled lives. Since 2021/22 the Scottish Government has provided recurring £50,000 in additional funding to all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland to support them to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach. Since 2025/26, this annual allocation of funding has been permanently transferred into the General Revenue Grant. The baselining of the funding for local areas supports messages around the long-term national commitment to this work. However, local areas continue to highlight challenges around securing leadership and organisational commitment to this work locally.

Alongside the progress that has been made across Scotland, local areas have also identified several challenges to embedding trauma-informed and responsive services. This includes competing demands placed on both practitioners and managers/leaders and limited organisational and individual capacity in the current context; instability around long-term funding to support implementation, which impacts on long-term planning around systems and culture change work; developing collective leadership and accountability for this work; and challenges around building capacity and capability through the national training model.

31% of local areas agreed that a lack of leadership and/or organisational commitment is a key barrier and emphasise the need for continued support to strengthen leaders' understanding of a trauma-informed and responsive approach and how it can support existing local and national priorities. Some local areas also noted that there is further work to do to improve engagement and strategic buy-in from managers, such as promoting trauma-informed training opportunities, highlighting the role of leaders in driving forward this agenda, and the importance of embedding trauma-informed and responsive practice across organisational culture.

Local areas also emphasised the importance of taking a joined-up approach and the need for collective leadership of this work, both locally and nationally. The formalising in 2025 of the National Trauma Leads Network from an informal peer support network to a formal, national network is another step towards supporting greater consistency and collaboration across local areas and developing a collective voice on shared issues impacting progress of this work across Scotland.



What does this mean for elected members?

The Scottish Government and COSLA have a shared ambition for a trauma-informed workforce, systems 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 achieve this, we need workforces and services that:

- ▶ **Realise** how common trauma and adversity is.
- ▶ **Recognise** how trauma can affect people.
- ▶ **Respond** in a way that supports recovery and resilience.
- ▶ **Resist** re-traumatisation.
- ▶ **Recognise** the importance of relationships.

The work to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach is reinforced and supported by local and national strategies and action plans:

- ▶ Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan
- ▶ The Independent Care Review
- ▶ Equally Safe
- ▶ Mental Health Strategy (2017-2027)
- ▶ Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan
- ▶ Public Service Reform
- ▶ National Strategy for Community Justice

Out of the 29 local areas who responded to the survey, 90% of local areas indicated that they had used the funding provided by the Scottish Government in 2024-25 to fund, or part-fund, a Trauma Lead Officer role in their local area. Although the Trauma Lead Officer role and remit differ across different local authorities, Trauma Lead Officers provide project management support and coordination, as well as strategic and/ or operational implementation support, including the provision and facilitation of training.

Evidence tells us that embedding sustainable trauma-informed and responsive ways of working is rooted in long-term culture and systems change. The [2025 National Learning Report](#) highlights substantial progress across local areas as well as the breadth of organisational readiness and implementation work happening across local authority areas to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach, the early evidence of the impact of this work and the progress made towards the short- and long-term outcomes outlined in the [NTTP logic model](#):

- ▶ 97% have 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.
- ▶ 90% have 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.
- ▶ 72% have identified early signs/evidence that staff are more likely to report feeling confident, supported, and empowered to translate knowledge and skills into practice changes.
- ▶ 69% have identified early signs/evidence that services and systems are more likely to be designed and delivered with an understanding of trauma in mind and around people's holistic needs, and this is balanced with the smooth running of our system.

Examples of good practice

The learning report highlighted a number of examples of good practice from across local authority areas, including:

Integrated Impact Assessment

“There has been extensive work on policies and procedures taking a trauma lens over many of our programmes of work including allocations, attendance, absence, sexual harassment in the workplace and so on. We recently launched an integrated impact assessment that has a section which focuses on cross cutting issues, of which trauma is one. This means that all policies and procedures from [Local Area] Council will have a trauma lens [and consider] the impact on those with lived experience of trauma is and any mitigations that need to be put in place. We have now developed an oversight group that consists of local leads to monitor improvements and scrutinise the process.”

One example of good practice highlighted in the learning was one Local Authority’s implementation of an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). The approach was driven by the need to address complex challenges in the local authority and ensure a consistent response and comprehensive governance. The IIA supports incorporating children’s rights, a trauma-informed practice approach, child poverty, and other agendas into daily operations rather than looking at them in isolation.

It also gives further consideration to additional cross-cutting agendas as part of the wider strategic decision-making process, including:

- ▶ Children’s Rights, through the completion of a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment.
- ▶ Sustainability, climate change and biodiversity.
- ▶ Trauma Informed Approach.
- ▶ The ageing population.
- ▶ Health and Wellbeing.
- ▶ The Promise.
- ▶ Rurality.
- ▶ Public Sector Equality Duty, Human Rights and Fairer Scotland Duty.

The IIA replaced the current Equality Impact Assessment process and involved over a year of rigorous testing, with the final version approved by the Cabinet in September 2024.

An oversight group composed of staff from across the council supported the development of the IIA incorporating their expertise and experiences and offering input in areas those completing the IIA may be less confident in and supporting a joined-up approach to tackling strategic challenges. The process also allows elected members to monitor the impact of their decisions on certain areas and evaluate the impact of current strategies. Updates are made to panel papers to incorporate appropriate language, ensuring a trauma-informed lens is used to examine policies.

Leadership Journey

Another example is a [leadership pledge](#) made by a local authority in 2023 to embed trauma-informed culture, workforce and services. The pledge is a public statement, and progress on this pledge is reported annually, ensuring that trauma-informed practice stays on the radar. It allows progress to be shared and opportunities to be identified.

In June 2025, the council began delivering leaders sessions, specifically for line managers and leaders. These are three hour in-person sessions delivered to 12-15 people, open to anyone in a line management or a leadership position across all sectors and facilitated by the Trauma Strategic Group. The sessions are regularly evaluated and based on the needs of leaders and delivered on a regular basis. At the end of each session, participants are asked to create a trauma-informed action pledge within their own context and asked to share the pledge in the evaluation. The strategic group follows up with them six weeks later to report on progress, offer support and ask if there have been any barriers in fulfilling that pledge. Actions have ranged from adding wellbeing to a meeting agenda, to a trauma-lens walkthrough of a service area. Feedback from sessions have been extremely positive, with participants appreciating the opportunity to reflect on progress.

Another major development was the leadership conference the Local Authority held in October 2025. This was open to any leaders across all sectors, with 110 attendees. The purpose of the session was to remind leaders of the crucial role they play in embedding a trauma-informed approach. It helped establish next steps and long-term ambitions, and leaders were also asked to make an action pledge and were followed up after the event.



Key actions for elected members to consider

There are a number of actions elected members can take to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across their Local Authority:

- ▶ Work collaboratively with specialist services and Trauma Lead Officers to raise awareness of current work to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach across the local area.
- ▶ Review policies with a trauma-informed lens using resources such as the [trauma-lens walkthrough tool](#).
- ▶ Highlight areas of improvement and opportunities to develop trauma-informed culture and policies across services and workforces.
- ▶ Ask for regular reporting processes on progress towards embedding a trauma-informed approach to further identify opportunities and keep the trauma agenda on the radar.
- ▶ Take part in training, such as [Scottish Trauma Informed Leaders Training \(STILT\)](#), to keep informed on the progress and impact of trauma-informed practice.
- ▶ Collaborate with Trauma Lead Officers in producing a leadership pledge within the Local Authority and encourage officers and elected members to take part.
- ▶ Promote leadership training for service managers.
- ▶ Ensure trauma-informed practice is included in strategic plans of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and other local partnerships.
- ▶ Ensure the voices of lived experiences are included and fed into strategic planning and policy development, and decision-making processes.

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Further support and contact

Please contact trauma@improvementservice.org.uk for more information on support available for elected members, local authorities and other community planning partners on adopting a trauma-informed approach.

For more information, the full [National Learning Report](#) and [executive summary](#) is available, along with the [Knowledge and Skills Framework](#) and [The Trauma Training Plan](#).

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The logo for Improvement Service, featuring the letters 'is' in a dark blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. The 'i' has a red dot above it, and the 's' has a red dot at the bottom right. Below the 'is' is the word 'improvement' in a dark blue, lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by the word 'service' in a red, lowercase, sans-serif font.
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