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Children's Services Reform Research Study: Leading for change: the role of leadership in transformational change

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Fourth in a series of webinars to take a further look at what the Children's Services Reform Research findings mean if Scotland is to achieve impactful, meaningful change and how these themes have been developing.

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Children's Services Reform Research study

Aim: To gather evidence to inform decision-making about the delivery of children's services in light of the proposed introduction of the National Care Service

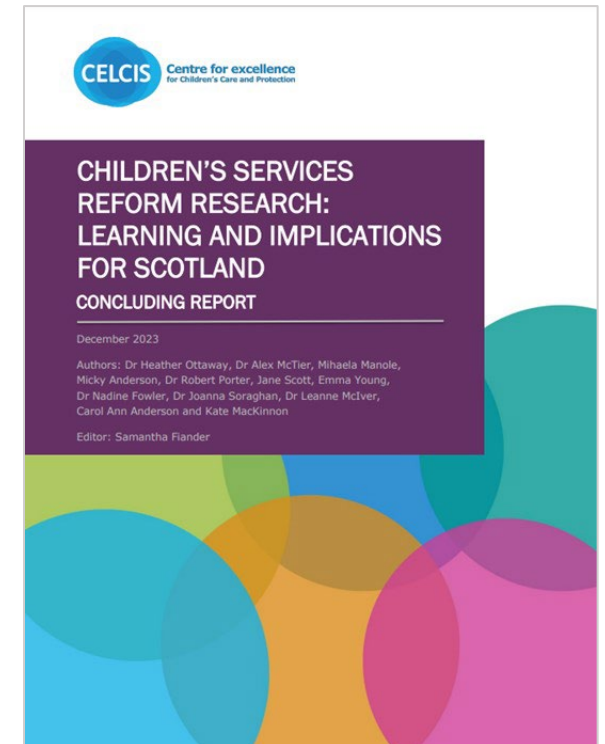
Research question: What is needed to ensure that children, young people and families get the help they need, when they need it?

Strand 1:
Rapid evidence review

Strand 2:
Case studies of transformational reform programmes

Strand 3:
Mapping integration and outcomes in Scotland: A statistical analysis

Strand 4:
Scotland's children's services landscape: The views and experiences of the children's services workforce



Why focus on leadership for change?

- Scotland has an ambitious policy agenda for children and their families, including embedding UNCRC and GIRFEC, and realising the Promise of the Independent Care Review.
- Meeting these ambitions is a complex and prolonged process which requires significant change on a number of levels, including to practice, culture, systems and services.
- Our research found that effective leadership is a key element for creating optimal conditions for change, which includes an understanding by leaders of what it takes to achieve change.

Why focus on leadership for change?

- Without this understanding, the time, space, permissions and resources that are required to plan, implement and deliver change cannot be built.
- We will explore what our research says about:
 - workforce experiences of, and aspirations for, leadership in Scotland
 - what gets in the way of effective leadership
 - the role and requirements of leadership in complex change efforts
 - what is needed to support transformational leadership in Scotland to improve the lives of children and their families.

Workforce experiences of leadership in Scotland

- The complexity of being a leader in Scotland was evident in practitioner experiences of local leadership in our study, which was mixed.
- No leadership change area we asked about was rated as 'very good' and 'good' by more than 45% of our respondents.
- However, the value of effective middle management, which is critical for supporting strategic visions whilst also managing operational service delivery, was highlighted.
- A significant issue was a disconnect which was felt between national policy makers, civil servants, local leaders and managers with the realities of local, on-the-ground experiences.

What does Scotland's workforce appreciate from their leaders?

- Being committed to improving the lives of children and families.
- Being visible, approachable and actively connected to the workforce.
- Establishment of a learning culture to enable change and foster innovation.
- Being creative, brave and willing to take an 'educated risk'.
- A solid understanding of the specific area of work that they provide oversight for, and of the daily experiences of front-line practitioners.
- Listening and responding to workforce needs.
- Investing in the workforce through training, supervision and wellbeing support
- Empowering their staff and celebrating successes.

What can get in the way?

- Leading in the context of significant recruitment and retention issues within the children's services workforce.
- Managing increasing demand for services against reduced resources and short-term funding.
- A legislative and policy landscape that continues to be confusing and cluttered, with new policies and guidance being 'layered on', risking implementation into practice being less effective.
- Challenges in recruiting and retaining the right leaders.

What can get in the way?

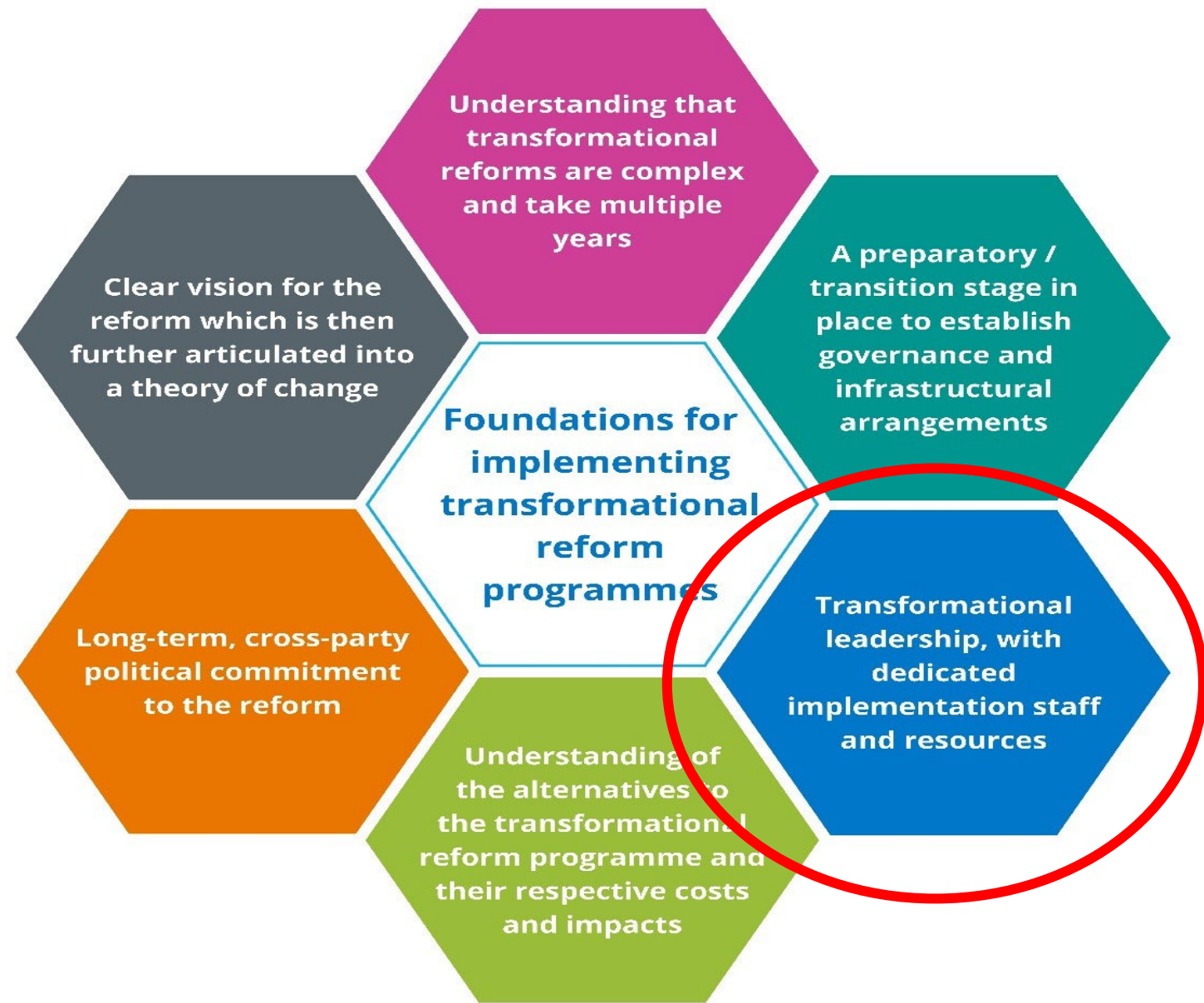
- Perceived risks of children's social work and social care services being marginalised by adult social care and health.
- Huge demands alongside a fast pace of change.
- Some senior leaders feeling isolated and unsupported in their roles.
- Lack of parity of esteem for some senior leaders, especially in the third sector.



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Foundations for implementing transformational change

The role of leadership in complex transformational change needs to be understood in the context of the foundations which are required for the change to be successfully implemented.



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What does transformational leadership aim to achieve?

Overcoming the push factors and embedding the pull factors

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Push Factors for change

- Children's health and social care services were fragmented across national, regional and local structures and;
- Marginalised within a larger health and social care system for all ages.
- Practice was described as risk-oriented, deficit-based and centred on crisis management.
- Limited participation of children, young people and families in decisions and planning that affect their lives.
- An imbalance in service funding and provision towards specialist and reactive services rather than early help and preventative services.

Pull Factors for change

- Closer integration of national, regional and local organisations to enable more joined up planning, funding and delivery of children's health and social care services.
- Re-balancing service funding and provision towards early help and preventative services which, in turn, aim to improve children's outcomes.
- Improved access to services for children and families, including enhanced or seamless transitions between different services.

Pull Factors for change

- Embedding of children's rights and building a new relationship between services and children and families – one characterised by professionals practicing in a positive, strengths-based, and empowering manner.
- Enhanced working between practitioners from different services.
- Improved workforce supports, including through opening up career development and progression opportunities.

Characteristics of transformational leadership

- An understanding of complex, multi-disciplinary systems and how to bring about changes in such systems.
- Recognition of the need to have a theory of change that sets out the structural, process and/or practice change(s) involved and the expected outcomes and impacts of these.
- Effective and inclusive communication of the reforms to internal and external stakeholders and audiences.
- Empowers practitioners, giving them autonomy in how they work with children, young people and families.
- Builds the capacity needed for meaningful participatory practice with children, families and communities.
- Actively promotes the joint development of shared understanding and culture across different services and disciplines.

What is needed to support transformational leadership in Scotland?

- Investment in the workforce to address significant recruitment and retention issues, which will also allow opportunities for capacity to implement transformational change.
- National and local support is required to enable effective multi-agency working.
- Scotland's cluttered legislative and policy landscape needs clarity and alignment.

What is needed to support transformational leadership in Scotland?

- Co-ordination is needed between national and local leadership to build collaboration and consensus, so that the long-term vision and agreed policy direction is consistent within and across system and service boundaries and geographies ('hidden work').
- A culture of collaborative leadership needs to become integral to any complex change effort, and this needs to be strengthened across Scotland.
- Time, clarity and resources are needed to plan, implement and deliver transformational change.



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Thank you

You can find all five reports at:

<https://www.celcis.org/our-work/research/childrens-services-reform-research-reports>

