

Briefing: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2023-24

Overview

Scottish Government published its [Programme for Government](#) (PfG) on 5 September, setting out its commitments for 2023-24, alongside [letters](#) from the First Minister to each Cabinet Secretary outlining agreed priorities to the end of the parliamentary term in 2026.

This is Humza Yousaf's first PfG and it sits within the context of his three driving ambitions for government, set out shortly after he became First Minister (FM), which underpin how policies and programmes should be prioritised:

- **Equality:** Tackling poverty and protecting people from harm
- **Opportunity:** Building a fair, green and growing economy
- **Community:** Delivering efficient and effective public services

Focus of Programme for Government

The focus for this year's Programme for Government is firmly on **tackling poverty** (particularly child poverty) and **supporting economic growth**.

When introducing the PfG, the FM only talked about **healthcare** towards the end of his speech, behind commitments to tackle poverty, access to childcare, support for industry, housing, climate change, transport and support for tourism (though health has a more prominent position in the PfG itself).

There is some recognition of the role of the **third sector** though it is quite weak. The relationship and contribution of businesses is a much higher priority, as is resetting the relationship between Scottish Government and local authorities.

Disappointingly, there are **no specific commitments around hospice and palliative care**. This includes no commitment to a new palliative care strategy, despite work being well underway to develop the new strategy and Ministers having made various public commitments to it in recent parliamentary questions (and it being in last year's PfG). A previous commitment to a new transitions to adulthood strategy also had no mention.

In a parliamentary debate on equality in the PfG, Miles Briggs MSP asked whether Scottish Government stands by its commitment made by the First Minister in March for a new national funding framework for hospice care, but only received the response (from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice): *"I am sure that that is an aspect that the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care can deal with in his closing speech. I recognise that many hospices, and, indeed, many charities in the third sector, are facing challenges, and we are very keen to support them where we can but within the limited budget that we have."* It was not picked up again by the health cabinet secretary.

Opportunities for hospices and palliative care

The PfG presents various opportunities to demonstrate the contribution of the hospice sector in addressing Scottish Government priorities. For example, hospices have a key role to play in Scottish Government's commitment to a **sustainable health and social care workforce** and its renewed focus on **cutting delayed discharges and reducing hospital occupancy**, through **expanding out of hospital pathways**.

Hospice UK will continue to work with members to ensure the **National Care Service Bill** recognises and responds to the growing need for palliative care, and ensures the contribution of the third sector is recognised, valued and given an equal voice. The proposed Scottish Human Rights Bill presents a potential opportunity to try and secure a right to palliative care in Scotland. We will also work to ensure that the commitment to a new **national centre for remote and rural health** includes a focus on palliative care, building on Hospice UK's current work exploring inequalities in end of life care in remote and rural areas.

Key commitments in areas of interest:

Workforce

- **Improve workforce planning**, practice and culture with a focus on collaborative, compassionate leadership, wellbeing and equality to deliver **a more sustainable and skilled workforce**, supported by the commencement of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019, and take forward the recommendations from the Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce.
- Implement the Agenda for Change review and revised pay bargaining processes for junior doctors to improve pay structures and future pay negotiations.
- FM's speech emphasised "***the vital importance of supporting our health and care workforce***" and that NHS staff in Scotland receive the highest pay across the UK and are the only nation to have avoided industrial action.

Primary/community care

- Improve access to GP services through further **expansion to multi-disciplinary teams** and embed access principles for patients and practices to ensure services meet local needs
- Establish the Expert Medical Generalist GP role and future career pathway with professional bodies.

Delayed discharge

- Improve consistency of provision and deliver improvements in health and social care to **significantly reduce delayed discharge and hospital occupancy**.
- Continue to **expand Hospital at Home and other out of hospital pathways** to reduce occupancy levels and improve flow for both unscheduled and planned care (Hospital at Home aiming to increase capacity by 50% from 2022/23 by end of March 2024).

- *Letter to Health Cabinet Secretary also states:* Deliver actions to **create the necessary capacity at times of surge**, through effective **winter planning** and expanding Hospital at Home.

Remote and rural

- **National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care** to improve primary and community services, expected to launch in October 2023.

National Care Service

- **Deliver the National Care Service legislation**, subject to the agreement of Parliament, to ensure consistency of provision and improvements in social care, social work and community health support, **working in partnership with people who access and deliver services, trade unions, Local Government and the third sector.**
- *Letter to Health Cabinet Secretary also states:* Stage 1 of the National Care Service Bill will continue to progress this year, and we will work towards completion of Stage 2 of the Bill by Easter 2024.

Human Rights

- Introduce a landmark **Human Rights Bill**, and invite the Scottish Parliament to bring back the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill for reconsideration stage, to **deliver legislation that protects and enhances a fuller range of human rights** within the limits of devolved competence – improving the lives of those most marginalised and vulnerable in our society.

Third sector

- Build on the recent passage of the Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Act 2023 and work with the third sector and partners to develop the scope **for a wider review of charity regulation.**
- As part of our commitment to **support the third sector with Fairer Funding** we will produce a plan to deliver improvements including greater clarity and consistency of existing arrangements, **recognising the sector's strategic role in enabling the transformation and delivery of person-centred services** for the people of Scotland.
- However, the letter to the Health Secretary has **more of a focus on business than the third sector**: *"It is important to recognise this work cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires collaboration with key partners: Health Boards, Local Government, business (including small businesses), trade unions, communities and third sector partners, among others" and "I would also particularly encourage you to work closely with the business community to ensure that policies and how they are delivered takes account of potential impacts on businesses and considers opportunities for businesses, especially small businesses, to benefit from our policies and spend."*

Social security/cost of living

- **Invest £5.3bn in Scottish Government benefits** in 2023-24 to support over 1.2 million people to improve the support to carers by **introducing the Carer Support Payment** to replace Carer's Allowance in Scotland.
- Undertake an independent **review of Adult Disability Payment** to ensure the benefit continues to meet the needs of disabled people.
- Support people with the **cost of living** by increasing the Scottish Child Payment, **Funeral Support Payment** and all disability and **carers benefits** in line with inflation.
- Publish an Immediate Priorities Plan for **disabled people** that recognises the disproportionate impact the **cost of living crisis** and the pandemic has had on this group, setting out clear actions for change

Pay for social care workers

- In his speech the FM suggests that all early learning and childcare workers *and* all **adult social care workers** would be paid **£12/hr from April 2024**. The response from the Scottish Green Party indicates that is their expectation. But **the language used across the PfG and the letters to Cabinet Secretaries varies**. The Coalition of Care Providers Scotland have raised concerns about that shift in language.
- Letter to Health Cabinet Secretary states: *"Continue to work with HSCP's, COSLA, Scottish Care and CCPS via regular troubleshooting sessions to ensure the £10.90 pay uplift is being processed in line with policy, and that Adult Social Care staff receive the 23/24 uplift."* And **"Ongoing development and support to evaluate viable options and timelines to deliver an uplift up to £12.00 per hour for Adult Social Care pay."**
- Letter to Education Cabinet Secretary states: *"Provide funding to uplift pay in the PVI sector to £12 per hour for those delivering funded Early Learning and Childcare – this action is needed now to support effective recruitment and retention of staff working in the sector"*.

Bereavement

- Launch a Certificate and Memorial Book of **Pregnancy and Baby Loss** Prior to 24 Weeks.
- Work to ensure people who experience miscarriage or stillbirth receive **three days of paid leave**, implementing this across the public sector and **calling on the UK Government** to make the necessary changes to employment law to make this available for everyone.

Contact for more information

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