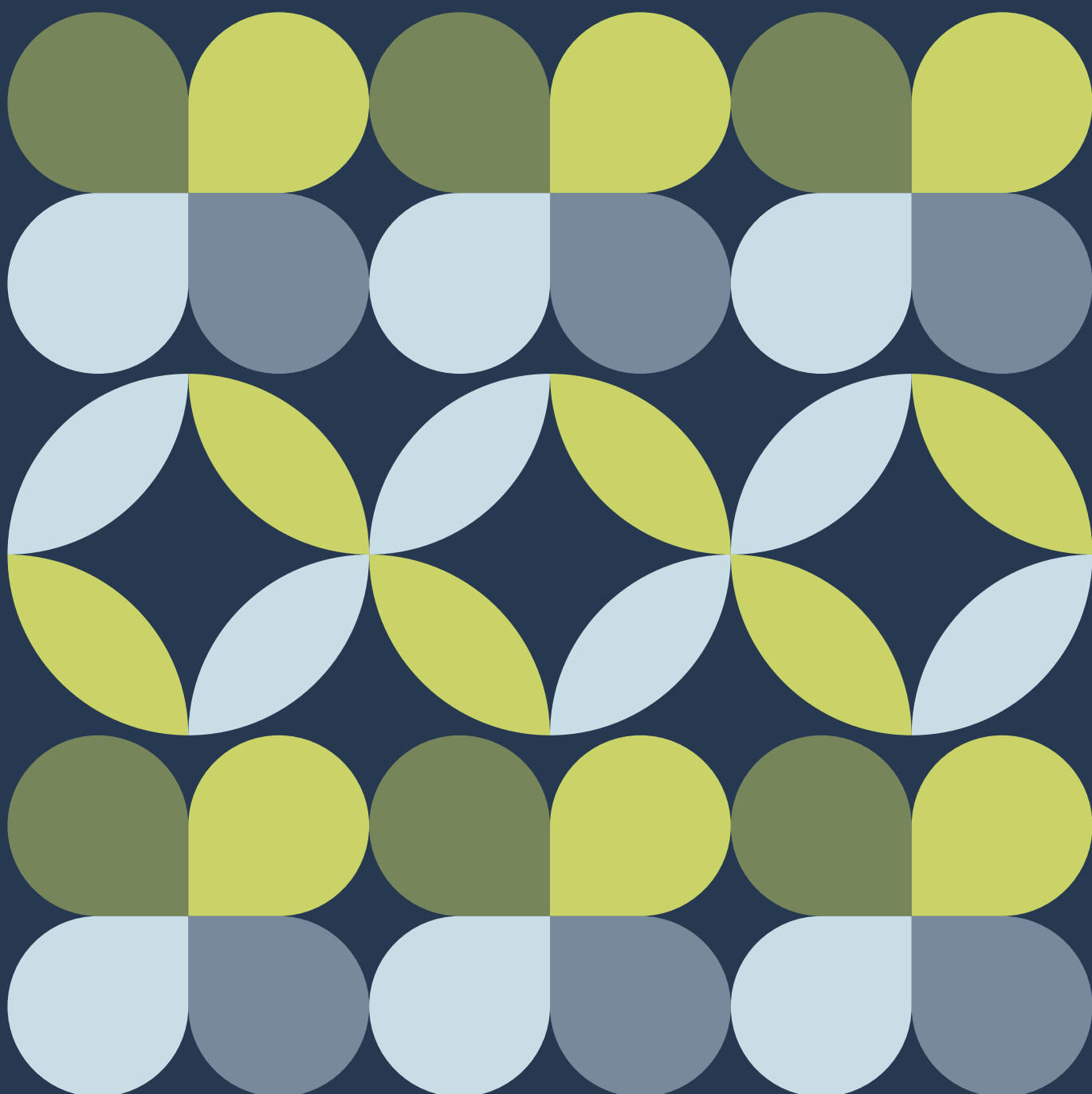




# THE **IMPACT** OF **IRISS**

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**2024/25**



# Introduction



After a successful first year focusing on evidence-informed innovation (identifying the right thing to do) to help partners make changes, we decided to continue some of these projects, and invite more partners for 2024/25.

We continued to focus in three priority areas: day-to-day dignity, space to practice and foundations for change, alongside our existing programme of improvement support in adult support and protection. After learning last year that readiness is an important factor in innovation projects, we had prospective partners join us for an ideas lab workshop where they told us what they would like help with and how ready they were to make the change. We worked with them to progress their readiness in the workshop before inviting the shortlisted partners to work with us on their priority areas using our model for innovation support.

Our work can't happen without financial support from our funders. We would like to note our thanks to our principal funders the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA), the Adult Support and Protection (ASP) team, and the Adult Social Care Ethical Commissioning team (ASCEC) in the Scottish Government as well as our other clients and partners that make our work possible. Your funding allows us to create the conditions for social work and social care support to flourish.

# Our focuses

## DAY-TO-DAY DIGNITY



The sector told us that dignity is one of the reasons they got into working in social work and social care and that it is one of the things that are most important to those that receive support. Dignity is one of five core human rights principles, alongside fairness, respect, equality and autonomy. Our stakeholders told us about the constraints and pressures they are under – workloads, expectations, processes and paperwork – and that this noise pulls them away from their core values and motivation, leaving them demotivated and dissatisfied with their work.

## SPACE TO PRACTICE



The sector told us that the workforce lacks the space to reflect on and improve practice due to multiple pressures such as caseload levels, increasing demand and decreasing resources. They asked us to focus on practice to support making space to learn, reflect, and build relationships to make social work and social care better.



## FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The sector told us about the constraints of the system; the things that get in the way of their best work and are difficult for people to tackle alone or within organisations and teams. Foundations for change focuses on changing the factors in the system to remove barriers such as processes, paperwork, cultures and environments.



## ADULT SOCIAL CARE ETHICAL COMMISSIONING TEAM (ASCEC)

We were funded by the Scottish Government Ethical Commissioning Team to deliver an ethical commissioning programme focussed on supporting implementation of the ethical commissioning and procurement principles at both local and national level.



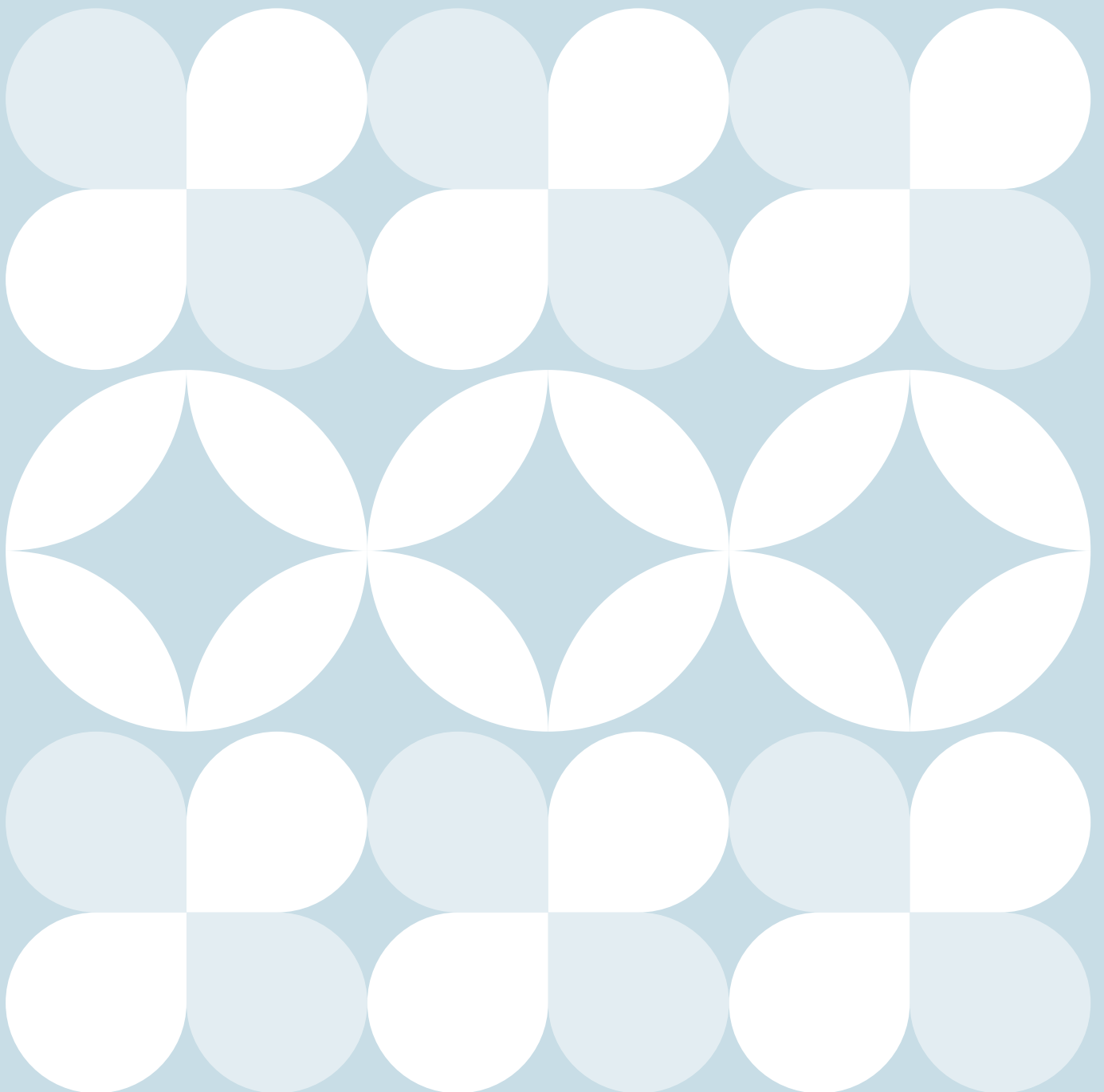
## ADULT SUPPORT AND PROTECTION (ASP)

We understand how important it is to support our multi-agency sector as a whole so have continued to deliver our Adult Support and Protection programme in partnership with, and funded by, the ASP team in the Scottish Government. We had a number of interlinked projects in this area, many of which were continuations of previous work.

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# Our projects 2024/25

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## COLLABORATION



DAY-TO-DAY DIGNITY



SPACE TO PRACTICE

Our work with the **Hoarding Taskforce** on the topic of hoarding and how to support people with problematic levels of clutter has generated a huge amount of interest from across the sector! Hoarding disorder and chronic disorganisation is a hidden and emerging issue that is not well-understood, with a need to better manage risk and support people who hoard as well as those around them and professionals working in this space. We also need a much more joined up multi-disciplinary response.



This is ongoing work; in Year 1 we have ‘built the team’ to support a more joined up national approach and explored the topic in real life context. We have also worked to identify and listen and learn from experts by experience, to build this into our work. And we have been out and about listening, networking and engaging with different stakeholders and uncovering some innovative practices. This work has shown a real need to re-frame this issue and Taskforce members are identifying priorities for Year 2. Keep up to date with this project on our [hoarding blog](#).



*I'm feeling positive although we're at the beginning of understanding and working with hoarding, but feels with enough agencies working together we can make progress.*



*We can be more proactive in bringing services together to make effective support.*



*I've learned about the people behind the hoarding and to see the person, not just the problem.*

## SUPPORTING SOCIAL WORK STUDENT PLACEMENTS IN THE THIRD SECTOR



### SPACE TO PRACTICE

We have been working in partnership with **a range of Third Sector Organisations** to create a resource to help build **better placement experiences** for student social workers, universities and hosting organisations. This work has been focused on creating a strong coalition around the student, supporting them, ultimately for the benefit of supported people. The resource highlights some of the potential gaps, as well as indicating where and how to build strong relationships and links between partners.

Throughout this project, we have heard that having a space to connect with others in the placement world, and to understand more fully the other roles within it, has been embraced by all those involved. We were delighted to be joined by many universities and third sector organisations at the launch event for this resource and to see them engage enthusiastically with the material presented on the day.

There are many ways that this work could develop, and many avenues that it could take; a reflection of the rich perspectives that have been shared, and the appetite for improving this part of social work education in Scotland.



*It [the resource] works from a strengths based approach without being an inconvenience for anyone involved in placements, it provides simple but effective ideas for students, link workers, practice educators and Higher Education Institutions to make the placement more successful.*

## EMPOWERING FRONTLINE STAFF



SPACE TO PRACTICE



FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

We worked with **Scottish Borders HSCP**, bringing together people from across adult social work with a vision to focus on self-evaluating adult social work services (what's working, what's not, and how things can be better); the group identified a particular focus on improving access and referral processes (the 'front door').

In between sessions with Iriss, some members of the group created collaborative meetings involving customer service and What Matters Hub staff to reflect on real examples of what's going well (and not so well) in those first conversations and improve guidance. This also included how they might develop and deliver training to boost skills and confidence in handling tricky calls and knowing where to signpost people.

Iriss used tools like empathy mapping, story-based reflections, and deep democracy check-ins and check-outs, to better understand how people experience services – both staff and supported adults. From this, the group analysed statistical referral data and existing data from participation with supported adults to identify inefficiencies and needs that could inform a redesign.

The idea of creating a Screening Team to triage referrals, increase consistency, and reduce inappropriate referrals has been proposed. Iriss is facilitating the group to devise a proposal for senior management that maps out their ideas.



*It's encouraging to see that we're all on the same page and eager to make meaningful changes.*



*We are seeing the importance of co-production and relationships to make change. We can't do this as one little entity, it relies on so much more.*



## A CHANGE IN DIRECTION



FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Following on from a previous project we worked with **Falkirk HSCP** to provide support around training for providers. The solutions this project has aimed to implement changed over the duration of the work, and the team purposefully maintained a flexible approach to build iteratively and respond to emerging information.

This was a particularly iterative piece of work, as we recognised the need to build slowly and involve the partner in understanding why we – the whole team – were moving away from the original proposal of a training consortium. The Iriss approach allowed us to do this in a way that was collaborative, and that resulted in an outcome that was helpful to the partner – a MS Teams site to provide training support. This approach also allowed us to explore the world of commissioning and contract management more widely; giving depth and insight to the project, and the partner themselves, while staying on track to deliver the agreed outcome.



*We initially visualised the development of a ‘training consortium.’ However the project group and Iriss assisted me and the Providers to really drill down to what they actually required for this particular Framework. Via project work and exploration, we established it wasn’t a training consortium we were looking for: it was a platform to share information... Great teamwork and innovation all round!*

## SUPPORTING ETHICAL COMMISSIONING AND COMMISSIONERS



We worked with the Scottish Government Adult Social Care Ethical Commissioning team to provide support to facilitators for their implementation plan, provide intensive support to local areas, design training and support on ethical commissioning for commissioners and update the Iriss ethical commissioning online course. A [key issues and learning report](#) was created to be used as a guide for commissioners and others to better understand how to implement the ethical commissioning and procurement principles, support improvement of commissioning practice at local level, and highlight ongoing solutions for the future. We are excited to continue our work with the Scottish Government ASCEC team into 2025/26.

## COLLECTING AND USING DATA



In 2020 we began collating, analysing and reporting on the Scottish Government ASP data. This describes the demographics of adults at risk of harm, types of harm and level of ASP activities across Scotland, helping to inform ASP policy and practice. Since 2021 Iriss has led on developing a **national minimum dataset (NMDS)** to replace the prior annual survey. The NMDS has been co-designed with the sector to ensure it is useful for all parts of the ASP system. This quarterly information captures details about ASP referrals and inquiries, demographic information, type of harm amongst other data and is aligned with the most recent Code of Practice for ASP. In 2023/24, we rolled out the initial Phase 1 indicators, supporting practical implementation through drop ins to ensure effective response to sector priorities.

In 2024/25 we were delighted to roll out additional Phase 2 indicators. We continue to support the sector with quality assurance and implementation, working closely with our five learning partners and Scottish Government colleagues. Our continuing work in 2025/26 will be aimed at supporting data analysis and use at local level, and encouraging and supporting local areas to develop their skills and capacity.

## SUPPORTING PRACTICE



**Chronologies** are a core component of social work as they are a key way of recording and understanding the sequence of a person's life, their support and the decisions they and others have taken about them.

Building on the findings of our research into [ASP chronologies in 2023](#), we developed a tool to support leaders to address challenges with chronology practice. [Leading Chronology Improvement](#) is a reflection and self assessment tool that can be freely adapted and used to develop ideas for improvement. The tool is being well received with a group of learning partners; it has been highlighted that the links and signposts to other resources are helpful, the section involving the person in their chronology and taking a trauma-informed approach was welcome, and the points about analysis in chronology practice were useful.



*It's given us a framework, it's allowed us to take tangible actions and steps ... we were stuck about how to move things on. As a framework, you can pick out the bits you want to use. Iriss has been really supportive.”— Aberdeen City learning partner*



**National Chronologies Group**



We have also supported the ASP Implementation subgroup on Chronologies to widen its remit to become the **National Chronologies Group** with cross-sector, multi-disciplinary membership and now under the governance of the National Public Protection Leadership Group. This is a significant shift which signals a truly collaborative approach to promoting improved chronology practice across Scotland. We recently produced a podcast that captured a [conversation between members of the National Chronology Group](#) discussing key challenges, emerging positive practice, helpful tools, improving the analysis of chronologies, and personal reflections. We have also developed a video outlining the [origins, vision and priorities](#) for the refreshed National Chronologies Group.

We facilitated reflection sessions from members of the **National ASP Implementation Group** and the sub-groups to explore progress made over the past two years and inform future planning. The members' reflections were gathered through focus groups and a survey designed to explore insights, experiences, challenges, successes, and aspirations for the future.

A **large-scale investigation (LSI)** is undertaken when there are two or more adults at risk of harm, most commonly in a care and support setting, but sometimes in the community too. These are comparatively unusual and social workers may not have experience of conducting such an investigation. Building on previous work, we have worked with a short-life working group (SLWG) made up of multi-agency professionals; we discussed, debated, disagreed, and found ways forward in creating guidance to improve the quality and consistency of LSIs across Scotland. The latest version of the LSI guidance is now out for wider consultation.



*I think this looks amazing and we will be using this to shape our own LSIs.*

The **ASpire Hub** has wide recognition across the sector and is being consistently used to access resources. New categories are being created as the content grows. The blogs highlight emerging good practice (a theme that will be expanded on in 2025/6). The publication of the [implementation group resources](#) has been a highlight. Also found on the ASpire Hub is the [Working Together bitesize](#) resource produced by Iriss – a rapid, but solid introduction to the topic of people's participation in ASP. As well as summarising the material in the [longer training course](#), this new bitesize resource also includes reference to newer material.

This year we continued to host the **National Adult Support and Protection Coordinator (NASPC)**, Brenda Walker. This year she has focused on growing the ASP community, increasing ASP awareness and understanding amongst adjacent professions and sectors and improving practice through the ASpire event series:

- ASP Learning Sessions (recorded and available on the ASpire Hub)
- Assisted Decision Making Session and OPG Session
- Self Evaluation Session and the Care Inspectorate QIF Session
- Financial Harm Affecting Older Adults Session





# Policy and practice support

## RURAL SOCIAL WORK

As part of our work creating and sustaining networks of changemakers, we have continued to support the Rural Social Work Forum, a network of social workers with an interest in remote and rural issues. Run in partnership with Scottish Association of Social Workers, Social Work Education Partnership, and others from practice and academia this provides a range of webinars and an online conference. In May 2024, we held our second Rural Social Work Conference – [Hidden issues in rural social work and communities](#). Its aims were to challenge prevailing myths and stereotypes, and make these more visible in thinking about policy and practice. In doing so it celebrated what is good about rural social work practice, while not shying away from challenges for the future. We also continued with our rural social work webinar series delivering [The Promise in rural areas](#) with Tom Boyd, with a focus on retaining sibling contact and supporting kinship carers.

## IRISS COURSES

With more than 1,200 registered users, our [online courses](#) continued to deliver practice support to the sector:

**288**

USERS

Working together in adult support and protection

**234**

USERS

Child protection planning meetings

**234**

USERS

Ethical commissioning in social care

**204**

USERS

Large scale investigations (LSIs)

**202**

USERS

Multi-agency adult support and protection conferences

\*Figures accurate as of June 2025

## INSIGHTS

Through our Iriss *Insights* we continued to provide evidence to the sector. In 2024/25 we focused on engagement and accessibility around some of our Insights. This included a webinar on '[Suicide thoughts and behaviour in later life](#)' which offered practical advice and real insight on this overlooked topic. It also included '[Rethinking trauma: a social perspective](#)' which challenged participants to not see trauma as the only lens through which to view human suffering; arguing that we also need a social lens to understand

and respond to people's experiences as social workers. We were delighted to be able to have over 250 attendees to each of the webinars.

In 2025/26 we will commission new *Insights* on topics of key interest and relevance, such as how social work navigates AI amongst other topics.

## RESEARCH SUPPORT

We continued to provide responsive research support to colleagues in the Scottish Government and Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) this year, focusing on supporting the workforce.

- We created a [summary report of the Chief Social Work Officer Reports for 2023-2024](#) which sets out the current pressures on social work and the work undertaken locally to address these.
- We worked with the Scottish government and SASW to undertake a survey on racism in social work. The findings were presented at the NES conference on inequalities.
- On behalf of the Scottish Government we explored approaches to growing the number of Mental Health Officers (MHOs) in Scotland with a recommendation to develop a post-qualification mentoring or buddy scheme for newly qualified MHOs to support them to maintain their identity, feel valued and supported regardless of whether they are in a satellite or stand-alone team.

## CONFERENCE

We ran our conference, [A day working with Iriss](#). The hope for this day was for attendees to hear about how Iriss does things (the ins and outs), see some project examples on how our partner created change and work through some of their own challenges. We wanted participants to be able to take away something tangible and practical from the day, a solution or step towards implementing their own change.

# Our strategy



In 2025 we published our [Iriss 10 year strategy](#) in which we highlighted the three resets we feel we need to help those working in social work and social care create the conditions for the sector to flourish:

- **Roles** – roles and approaches to the practice of social work and social care support that include building ways of working from the question of ‘what people need’ instead of what currently exists.
- **Leadership** – social work and social care leadership that combines a fundamentally person centred, systemic approach with functional and other leadership approaches.
- **Systems** – approaches to organising social work and social care that take a fundamentally systemic approach to influence locally and nationally.

We asked the sector what they thought our focus should be for this strategy and the most common response by far was “**support us with change**”. To do this we will work towards the resets and pull together what we learn, drawing together wider evidence and practical knowledge.

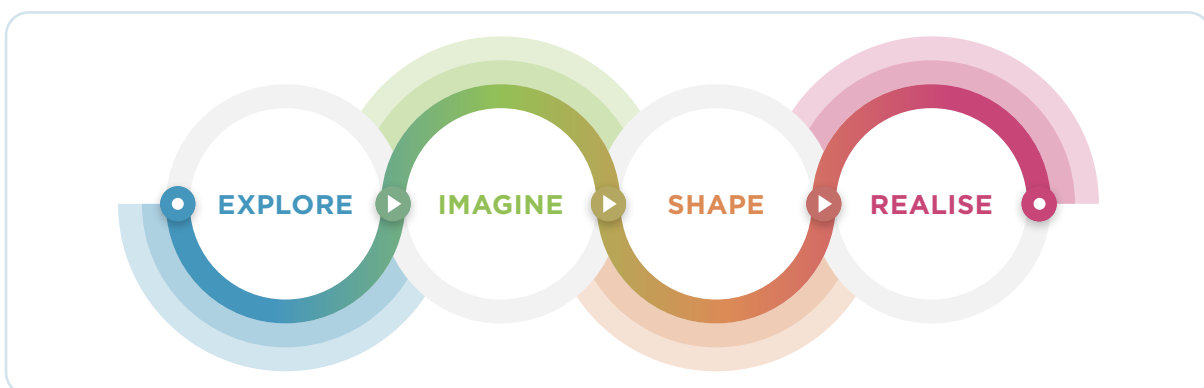
To ensure we remain aligned with this strategy we updated our evaluation plan and will assess the effectiveness of our work through our organisational outcomes:

- We know more about the complex problems of social work and social care support.
- People working in social work and social care know more about what works.
- People working in social work and social care support have a better understanding of how to tackle the complex problems they face.
- People working in social work and social care are better able to improve and innovate.



# Learning

We used our learning from our 2023/24 innovation portfolio work to help our 2024/25 partners, but learning is iterative. This year we learned more about how best to help people and organisations improve and innovate, despite their extremely challenging environment.



## RE-AFFIRMING THE IRISS MODEL

A highlight of this year has been a re-affirmation that the [Iriss innovation model](#) supports us and our partners to ensure that we are pursuing the correct fix to the issues or challenges presented. Many of our projects were iterative pieces of work and we recognised the need to build slowly and involve the partner in understanding why we – the whole team – were making these decisions. The Iriss approach allowed us to do this in a way that was collaborative, and that resulted in an outcome that was helpful to the partner.

It is clear from our work that the system and roles within the sector are complex and interlinked. This approach also allowed us to explore more widely, giving depth and insight to the projects, and the partners themselves, while staying on track to deliver the agreed outcomes.

## **AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE**

Once we start discussing the system the partners work within/alongside, the challenges they face or the problem they wish to solve, we can often shed a light on areas that have been less discussed. We can help our partners explore their contexts from different angles and see what is really important to them.

## **NO JOURNEY IS LINEAR**

Due to the iterative nature of our projects this can sometimes mean moving away from the original proposal. Changing direction or repeating a step can feel uncomfortable but the flexibility shown by partners allows the whole team to create a solution that is achievable and what serves their needs the best. Sometimes a pause in planned progress is needed and can allow a focus on alignment which can show you opportunities not yet considered.

## **AN EMPOWERED TEAM**

Often you build a project team based on the first planned outcome, but if the route changes, so can the required team. Having the right team can bring fresh energy and a willingness to challenge the assumptions, but this team also needs to be empowered to make change. There isn't always the capacity for managers to be embedded in change work, and the team needs to be leaders themselves (even if non-positional), motivated and self-organised. Team engagement can help groups reframe what is possible and what they can start to act on from where they are, with the influence they already have.

## **IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS**

Change is not a bad thing but it can sometimes be a hard thing to undertake, and our work has highlighted to us the importance of taking the time to build strong relationships with our partners at the start of projects. Gaining our partners' trust is vital to having open conversations on the expectations or progress within a project. The Iriss model wouldn't work without the partner engagement we have seen.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF REFRAMING

Through many of our projects we have seen the [impact that language can have on the sector](#) and the people who work with and for the services provided. We have spoken about this before, noting how instead of someone being 'unwilling' to engage they are 'unable' to, 'hard to reach' people or groups are now seen as 'seldom heard' people or groups.



This year we have seen reframing highlighted as particularly important within [our work with the Hoarding Taskforce](#), for example to see hoarding as a mental health issue, to help end stigma and shame and see the person first, not 'the stuff'. We have also seen a deliberate shift away from focusing on blame during the LSI process, instead emphasising collaboration and shared learning.

The language and approaches used are far more trauma-informed and person-centred, showing a continued mindset change.

## HOW TO USE DATA MORE

Having relevant and comparable data can start conversations around improvement and understanding differences in practice, however this only happens if you do more than collect the data. While asking the 'right' questions will gather you the important data, the data itself is of no use if it isn't analysed. By analysed, we mean that we try to understand the why behind changes or stagnations in the data. This can seem daunting to some people, as they are

not sure how to collect the ‘right’ evidence for this. We hear so often that the why is only known through anecdotal evidence but not through ‘proper’ data.

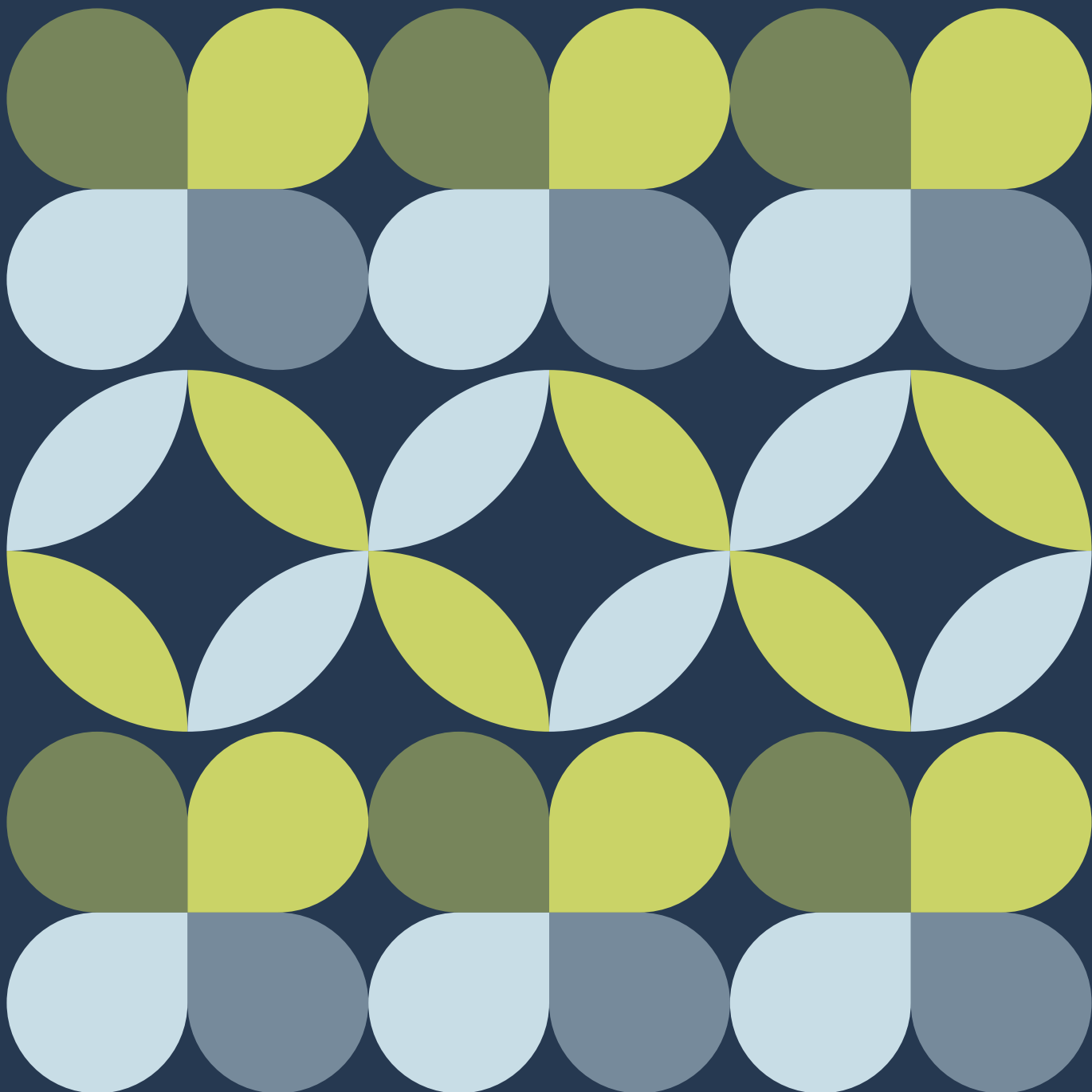
We are delighted that we have been able to help show the sector that collecting the data is a good start and have been pleased to see the progress the sector has made on data collection in the past year. We are also proud that we have started, and taken part in, wider conversations around what makes good data and how we can make sure the data we collect tells the full story of our impact. We are seeing progress and interest in the sector, but it is important to continuously review how and what data we collect to make sure it is relevant and as accessible as possible to everyone who might need it.

## **AMBITION FOR CHANGE**

Our narratives and how we talk about making change can impact our capability to feel like we can make change. If hope, inspiration and courage are needed for creativity and innovation, how do our narratives serve this? Saying a positive mindset is important might not seem particularly helpful, but we have seen that hope and confidence that change is possible are vital to creating it. If people don’t believe that change can happen they won’t look for ways to make progress. It’s inspiring to work with people who want to improve outcomes for people they support despite the difficulties of the system they’re in.

## **HOW IRISS CAN SUPPORT THE SECTOR**

From [our evaluation work](#), especially around our annual conference, the sector told us that a full-day conference is not always a suitable and accessible solution. We have started implementing shorter sessions on practical topics and have had excellent feedback from these. We plan to build on this and would like to hear if there is a topic you would want covered.



Scottish Government  
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