



Supporting the
Third Sector Project

How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?

Learning report on 2024-25 intensive locality support

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1. Introduction and background

This report aims to provide insight into the use of the *'How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?'* self-evaluation toolkit^{1 2} across 2024-25. Across the year, Children in Scotland, through the Supporting the Third Sector Project (STTS Project) has worked directly with three Children's Services Planning Partnerships to consider the role of the third sector in local children's services planning.

Written by Children in Scotland, with input from colleagues from across the three regions supported, this report provides guidance on how the self-evaluation toolkit can be used to support the delivery of Children's Services Plans and improve cross-sector collaboration and partnership working in improving outcomes for children and families.

The report outlines the intensive learning support provided by Children in Scotland through the Supporting the Third Sector Project with three localities:

- Aberdeenshire
- Dumfries and Galloway
- Glasgow.

The intention is that sharing the processes and learning from these three areas will help other localities see how the *'How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?'* self-evaluation tool could be used and have a meaningful impact on children's services planning in their local authority area.

Who is Children in Scotland?

Children in Scotland is a national children's charity rooted in children's rights and working to improve children's lives. Children in Scotland offers a broad, balanced, and independent voice by bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves. Children in Scotland creates solutions, provides support, and develops positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing learning, while always working to uphold children's rights.

What is the Supporting the Third Sector (STTS) Project?

The STTS Project supports Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) and the wider third sector to play a meaningful and influential role in national planning and decision-making to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. The STTS Project is funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by Children in Scotland.

What is the *'How Good is Our Third Sector Participation in Children's Services Planning?'* Self-evaluation Tool?

The *'How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?'* self-evaluation tool was published in early 2024 alongside a report on the findings from some pilot activity in 2022-23.

¹ Children in Scotland (2024) *Supporting the Third Sector Project, Self-evaluation tool: How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?*

² Throughout this report, the toolkit may be referred to as the HGIO toolkit

Purpose and use of the tool

Self-evaluation is an important feature of partnership working, supporting organisations to improve standards and quality of service delivery, as well as reflect on the effectiveness of collaborative strategic planning and decision-making. The use of quality indicators helps provide a structured approach to evaluating ‘where are we now?’ and ‘where and how might we improve things further?’³

The HGIO self-evaluation tool is not designed to be used as a one-off activity, but instead CSPPs are encouraged to draw on relevant sections at different points across their planning cycle in the way that makes the most sense to local needs. Stakeholders should feel free to use the tool flexibly and can adapt questions to suit the CSPP’s individual circumstances and needs.⁴ We envisage the tool being used cyclically, with CSPPs committing to ongoing self-evaluation and reflecting on different elements of their work at different times.

The HGIO self-evaluation tool is split into three areas of focus to help identify priority areas for self-evaluation:

- Leadership
- Children’s Services Planning: Strategic Planning and Delivery of Services and Support
- Measuring Success and Demonstrating Impact.

These areas of focus closely link with key tasks and duties set out within Children’s Services Planning legislation and supporting statutory guidance. Within each area of focus, the toolkit provides a series of challenge questions and highlights the features of highly effective practice. As such, it provides the framework for undertaking a piece of structured engagement work with the children’s sector locally.



2. Approach

Children in Scotland, through the STTS Project, was able to work intensively in three localities to support the use of the ‘*How good is our third sector participation in Children’s Services Planning?*’ self-evaluation tool.

The initial offer was presented to the National TSI Children’s Services Network, a network with representatives from Third Sector Interfaces across Scotland, which is facilitated by Children in Scotland. Additional drop-in opportunities were available for stakeholders to learn about the toolkit.

This offer of intensive support was centered around engaging key stakeholders within the locality on the participation of the third sector in children’s services planning locally. This work would be based round a programme of engagement that utilised the ‘How good is our third sector participation in Children’s Services Planning?’ toolkit.

³ Children in Scotland (2024) *Supporting the Third Sector Project, Self-evaluation tool: How good is our third sector participation in Children’s Services Planning?*

⁴ Ibid.

Children in Scotland's role in this work included developing knowledge and understanding of the toolkit among key stakeholders, administrative support, facilitation of meetings and engagement sessions, and support in the creation of resources, briefing papers, and agendas that may be required. Following the completion of the work, it was agreed that Children in Scotland would provide a summary report for each locality with a series of recommendations. Children in Scotland also committed to writing this report reflecting on the learning and outcomes of the improvement work across all three areas we engaged with.

To support the work, CSPPs agreed to provide input from both their local TSI and a key stakeholder from within the local authority or health and social care partnership to deliver and lead the work alongside Children in Scotland.

Ultimately, the aim of the work was to facilitate conversations about the role of the third sector in Children's Services Planning and to provide the framework for the development of an improvement plan.

Identifying localities

In total, six local areas across Scotland identified interest in being involved in making use of the toolkit. Having confirmed buy-in and agreement from **both** the local Third Sector Interface and the strategic lead from their local Children's Services Planning Partnership was the key factor in agreeing the final localities who accessed support from the STTS Project.

Agreement across all local stakeholders was seen as essential to ensuring successful use of the tool as it would require ongoing input across these stakeholders to effectively engage with both statutory and third sector partners.

As identified previously in this report, the final localities who received support through the project were Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway, and Glasgow. The three localities involved also have a range of distinct characteristics, Glasgow for example is a highly populated urban environment, whereas Dumfries and Galloway and Aberdeenshire are both more rural local authority areas. This has allowed us to use the tool in a range of contexts and identify its relevance across these contexts.

Developing an approach within each locality

Within each locality a project team made up of Children in Scotland staff, a representative from the Third Sector Interface, and a representative from statutory services within the Children's Service Planning partnership worked together to consider the toolkit and the context locally.

This group worked collaboratively to identify an area of focus within the tool to explore through this targeted work. There was also an opportunity to engage key stakeholders locally to identify their priorities.

All three groups identified 'Area of focus 2 - Children's Services Planning: Strategic planning and delivery of services/support' from the self-evaluation toolkit as the key theme to explore.

Following identification of the area of focus, the project group in each locality developed a programme of engagement based round the chosen area of focus. As the

tool is intended to be used in a holistic manner, there was flexibility in each locality to adapt the way they engaged with local partners to suit their local needs and context. Within each locality, the project group considered how to develop the findings from our work into an improvement plan. The exact format of this plan was agreed locally and as such differs in response to the context.

Total participants

| Area | Third sector participants (including TSI staff) | Participants from statutory services | Total participants |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Aberdeenshire | 17 | 6 | 23 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 13 | 13 | 26 |
| Glasgow | 22 | 17 | 49 |
| Total | 52 | 36 | 98 |



3. Making effective use of the toolkit – examples of approaches

The ‘*How good is our third sector participation in Children’s Services Planning?*’ toolkit provides a framework for undertaking engagement work with local partners on the role of the third sector within children’s services planning. It should be used to stimulate conversations about improvement and ultimately to drive change within the locality.

A key focus for this report is on supporting localities to make good use of the toolkit with less direct input from Children in Scotland. To support with this, we have provided an example approach that lays out key steps across the process of using the toolkit. We have also provided a short ‘process’ case study from each locality involved which covers the partners involved, the approach taken, and the number of participants.

We hope this provides practical guidance on how to use the toolkit. It is however also vital to recognize that the toolkit is intended to be flexible, and localities wishing to make use of it should adapt the approach to suit the local needs.

Table 1: Example process making use of the HGIO toolkit

- **Step one:** Establish a project team involving key stakeholders including a TSI representative and key stakeholder from statutory services (Local Authority Strategic Lead, HSCP Representative, etc.). Project team to get sign off from senior leadership within children’s services to take the work forward. Project team to also clearly identify roles and responsibilities to ensure clarity across the work.
- **Step two:** Consider the toolkit and the local context to understand whether there are specific areas you are particularly strong in or where you know you need to improve. Based on these discussions, identify your chosen ‘Area of Focus’. You may want to engage local partners and colleagues such as a local Children, Young People and Families Third Sector Forum to support decisions about using the tool.

- **Step three:** Once an 'Area of Focus' is chosen, establish what sections will be focused on, for example:
 - A specific set of challenge questions;
 - Specific themes; or
 - The whole 'Area of Focus' section.
- **Step four:** Establish a workplan for the next steps. For example, the core group could consider:
 - A plan for engagement based round the tool
 - Identify key stakeholders to involve. This includes considering both third sector and statutory partners and the most appropriate roles for attendance.
 - Identify how many engagement sessions will be delivered and how these will gather information.
- **Step five:** Creation of resources to promote and inform the third sector and statutory partners about the HGIO tool, the purpose of the work and any important information that may be needed prior to the engagement session. Examples include:
 - Creation of briefing papers including information about the HGIO tool and the current Children's Services Plan in that area.
 - Video resource explaining the aims and process of the self-evaluation approach.
 - Extra online sessions offered to provide people and organisations with the opportunity to ask any questions or to find out further information.
- **Step six:** Consider and create agenda(s)/session plan(s) for engaging with third sector and statutory partners. There should be flexibility in the format of these sessions, responding to the core groups' area of focus.
 - For example, if choosing 'Area of Focus 2', you could consider splitting this across two sessions to cover all the themes. The sessions could consist of asking attendees in small groups various 'challenge questions' and 'examples of highly effective practice' from the HGIO self-evaluation tool.
 - Discussions at engagement sessions should be facilitated by facilitators who understand the self evaluation tool. Discussions should be recorded to gather feedback and build the evidence base.
- **Step seven:** After the session(s) has taken place, all notes should be written up and collated into themes to be input into the HGIO tool template.⁵ The core project team should come together to consider the findings. These should be considered alongside their own knowledge of the locality. From here, the group should identify areas for improvement and log this within the 'What will we do' column of the template to establish next steps and potential actions.
- **Step eight:** Based on the information included in the template and the actions identified under the 'What will we do' section, the core team should develop an improvement plan.

⁵ Children in Scotland (2024) *Supporting the Third Sector: Self-evaluation Template*

- **Step nine:** Deliver a final session to share the proposed improvement plan with stakeholders who have engaged in the process and give an opportunity to comment on the plan and suggest amendments.
- **Step ten:** Get sign off on improvement plan from senior leadership within the CSPP and take forward plan for improvement.
- **Going forward:** As the improvement plan is implemented and monitored, you may wish to consider how you will continue the process of self evaluation and revisit the tool.

Table 2: Aberdeenshire HGIO Toolkit Case Study

Aberdeenshire



Key Partners:

- Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA)
- Aberdeenshire Council (GIRFEC Leadership Group and Child Protection Committee)
- Children in Scotland (Supporting the Third Sector Project).

Area of Focus:

- Area of Focus 2: Children's Services Planning: Strategic planning and delivery of services/support.

Delivery Approach:

- Identified core planning group and coordinated activity
- Presentation introducing the HGIO tool and planned engagement activity to Third Sector Children and Families Network and to GIRFEC Strategic Group
- Online drop-in session focused on providing information about the HGIO tool and self-evaluation more generally (30 minutes)
- Briefing paper resource produced to support understanding of the tool and allow preparation for first session
- First engagement session focused on Area of Focus 2.1 with facilitation support from Children in Scotland
- Summary paper of key themes shared to support awareness of session 1 discussions
- Second engagement session focused on Area of Focus 2.2 and 2.3 with facilitation support from Children in Scotland
- A third engagement session presenting results and draft actions improvement plan for discussion.

Participants:

- Session 1 – 19 total (11 - third sector, 3 – AVA, 5 – statutory services)
- Session 2 – 17 total (10 third sector, 2 – AVA, 5 statutory services)
- Session 3 – 17 total (10 third sector, 2 – AVA, 5 statutory services).

Status/Next Steps:

- Improvement plan in development and will be presented to Girfec Strategic Group for sign off early in 2025-26. Ownership of the Improvement Plan also to be agreed at this stage.

Table 3: Glasgow HGIO Toolkit Case Study

Glasgow



Key Partners:

- GCVS (Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector)
- Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership
- Children in Scotland (Supporting the Third Sector Project).

Area of Focus:

- Area of Focus 2: Children's Services Planning: Strategic planning and delivery of services/support.

Delivery Approach:

- Identified core planning group and coordinated activity
- Presentation introducing the HGIO tool and planned engagement activity to GCVS members and key local authority stakeholders
- Online drop-in session focused on providing information about the HGIO tool and self-evaluation more generally (30 minutes)
- Briefing paper resource provided in advance of session 1
- First engagement session focused on Area of Focus 2.1, with facilitation support from Children in Scotland
- Findings from session 1 shared with attendees and key stakeholder groups
- Second engagement session to consider proposed next steps for third sector participation in development of 2026-29 Children's Services Plan.

Participants:

- 49 Participants across 2 sessions (18 third sector, 4 GCVS, 17 statutory services).

Status/Next Steps:

- Development of approach to Third Sector engagement in 2026-29 Children's Services Plan
- Development of final paper outlining findings from the work.

Table 4: Dumfries and Galloway HGIO Toolkit Case Study

Dumfries and Galloway



Key Partners:

- Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Children in Scotland (Supporting the Third Sector Project).

Area of Focus:

- Area of Focus 2: Children's Services Planning: Strategic planning and delivery of services/support.

Delivery Approach:

- Identified core planning group and coordinated activity including identification of an area of focus
- Ongoing planning activity between group, with meetings facilitated by Children in Scotland to develop an approach
- Briefing paper and video resource circulated to attendees in advance of in-person engagement session
- In-person engagement session delivered in Dumfries covering Area of Focus 2, with facilitation and administrative support from Children in Scotland
- Follow-up session to discuss findings and next steps, tbc for late March.

Participants:

- 26 attendees in total (13 third sector, 13 statutory services).

Status/Next Steps:

- Briefing to be shared with participants in the initial engagement session outlining proposed actions
- Second engagement session planned for early 25-26 to consider proposed actions and agree improvement plan.



4. Learning from across HGIO Locality Work

This section of the report provides key learning from our work supporting the use of the self-evaluation toolkit in Aberdeenshire, Glasgow, and Dumfries and Galloway. This learning has been identified by the project team at Children in Scotland and through feedback from the stakeholders involved in the work.

The aim of this section is to support localities who are considering making use of the tool to understand how it can support their partnership working and aid local improvement work, building on the findings from our activity in 2024-25.

Key learning

- The toolkit supported localities to identify good practice and areas for development
- The toolkit helped individuals and organisations to build new relationships and strengthen existing relationships to support improvement
- The toolkit supported a collaborative and structured approach to assessing third sector participation in children's services planning
- The toolkit generated buy-in to the children's services planning process by supporting meaningful engagement
- The toolkit's holistic, adaptable approach allows it to be tailored to the needs of the user – but a clear purpose is required to have impact

1. The toolkit supported localities to identify good practice and areas for development

While at the time of writing, all three areas are in the final stages of developing their improvement plans and their approach to implementing these, they have all identified a series of initial benefits from using the tool.

Participants in the core project groups across the three localities reported that the work has supported participants to identify examples of good practice in relation to third sector participation in children's services planning. Not only did it help partners identify good practice, the projects also helped them to identify the activity and/or conditions that contributed to this. This has also supported all localities to identify areas for improvement and opportunities.

"My experience with the tool has been very positive. It has provided a clear framework for reflection and discussion, helping to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in third sector involvement"

Core Project Team Member

It is clear based on our experience that the toolkit has a meaningful role to play in this regard. We believe it can be an important mechanism for developing a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of localities' work in relation to third sector participation in children's services planning.

A key learning point for the team at Children in Scotland here has been around allowing the process to play out before identifying the areas for improvement. When undertaking a process like this, there can be a desire to 'fix' what we hear during the initial periods of engagement. However, as with any piece of engagement work, it is important to try to gather as clear a picture as possible before identifying next steps. This requires an element of bravery to step back, but we see this is as vital to ensuring that appropriate, meaningful actions which tackle systemic issues can be identified, rather than reacting to comments heard early in the process.

2. The toolkit helped individuals and organisations to build new relationships and strengthen existing relationships to support improvement

It is clear from our work supporting the three localities that positive pre-existing relationships between partners were important at the start of the process of using the tool. This was a key part of getting buy-in to the work. It is important therefore to recognize that there may be steps required to develop and stimulate these relationships before undertaking the self-evaluation process. An important part of this process across all localities was developing a shared trust and understanding between partners and a clear commitment to a development and improvement focused approach.

"Looking ahead, I expect the tool to support deeper and more sustainable engagement between third sector organisations and statutory partners. I anticipate that it will lead to more strategic and informed decision-making, ultimately improving outcomes for children, young people, and families"

Core Project Team Member

Feedback from the members of the core project teams across the three localities has emphasised that getting people together – in person – with the systematic but adaptable framework provided by the tool has supported constructive, critical conversations between partners across statutory and third sector organisations, as well as a wider reflection on practice. This feedback has also been reflected in comments by participants in the engagement sessions. It is important to recognize that in person engagement will prove challenging in some localities, however it is our experience that opportunities to work in person, were an important factor in each areas work.

“The tool has effectively enabled us to check out a collective view on how we are doing, which has critically challenged our own views on how we thought we were doing - often the case in self evaluation processes”

Core Project Team Member

“So far, the tool has helped to build stronger relationships between third sector organisations and statutory partners. It has highlighted areas where collaboration can be improved and has led to more open discussions about challenges and opportunities”

Core Project Team Member

It is worth noting that there were concerns about potentially challenging dynamics across localities due to perceived power imbalances between third and statutory sectors. However, across our work engagement activities have all been conducted in a respectful manner. As highlighted above, we feel that the clear commitment to an improvement focused approach across all localities has stimulated the respectful engagement that has been key to success in all three areas.

We also believe that central to this has also been a willingness from all partners to engage positively with what is shared, and to recognise the value of stakeholders' experience of the children's services planning process. Across the work we have reflected on the importance of these experiences of the CSPP structures in each locality – how people feel about these and how they experience them is vital for understanding how they work in practice. Active recognition of these power imbalances and a commitment to engaging constructively with these experiences has ultimately been key to the process. In doing so, there has also been a range of learning about structural and system responses which can help tackle these issues.

“It has brought us all together and given equity to the third sector - it's given them a voice. It has shown us how complex Children's Service Planning appears from the outside, how we can demystify it and bring the third sector along with us”

Core Project Team Member

The tool and the focus on improving outcomes has helped provide a framework where these discussions can take place, as partners have felt empowered to engage in positively.

“During the second session I became very aware of how included our third sector partners felt. It has given them a voice and supported them to feel respected and heard”

Core Project Team Member

Ultimately, undergoing the self-evaluation process has improved relationships between key partners across the three CSPPs. This included creating opportunities to build new cross-sector relationships and supporting partners to have open and honest conversations without jeopardising their relationships. The preparatory work and the structure of the engagement sessions helped to give people the space and permission to have constructive conversations about the challenges that exist and collaboratively develop solutions to overcome them. There was also evidence that undertaking the work had led to an increased clarity on the opportunities to widen engagement in the children's services planning process and improved understanding about how people can contribute to this.

It is worth noting that throughout our intensive support across the year, having an external partner may have helped to facilitate these conversations. While it is not our intention to deliver the same package of support for the self-evaluation process in 2025-26, we hope to be able to provide input across localities who wish to undertake the self-evaluation process and a key role for this can be as an impartial advisor who can provide guidance at the start of the process.

3. The toolkit supported a collaborative and structured approach to assessing third sector participation in children's services planning

Making use of the tool enabled all participants involved to take a holistic view of children's services across their CSPP, within a clear structure and with an agreed, tangible output.

Undertaking this process and having the opportunity to truly consider the make-up of the CSPP highlighted the importance of the third sector in the delivery of children's services. The tool also reiterated the barriers that exist to the full collaboration between third sector and statutory organisations within the locality, however, importantly the tool helped identify solutions to these.

Through our work, attendees were also able to identify examples of effective partnerships, and areas for improvement. People we worked with reported that the tool supported this, providing a framework for more structured reflection on existing partnerships and a platform to discuss how these could develop further.

"Use of the tool has created opportunities for focused, honest and equal dialogue between partners in improving our CS [Children's Services] planning, engagement and participation of TSOs [Third Sector Organisations]"

Core Project Team Member

Feedback from participants highlighted that the tool is useful for "identifying key focus and challenge areas – these are very useful for directing conversations". Using the challenge questions and features of effective practice as the basis of group discussions was identified as particularly helpful in guiding conversations towards shared areas of focus. The structure and layout of the tool were identified as helpful in directing and focusing group discussions to 'lead to a clear action plan'. The clear, ongoing communication about the outcome of the work also helped support buy in to the engagement, as all partners and participants could see the value of their contribution.

This feedback from participants indicates that the tool provides both a shared language and a series of prompts for discussion, which supports participants to be honest and open in their responses. By identifying what best practice looks like, the tool also

allows participants to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their localities, supporting a constructive approach to critical thinking.

It is also worth reiterating here that having a clearly defined project team was central to driving the work forward. These groups were able to ensure consistency across the project planning and management and to ensure the focus continued to be on the chosen area of focus and the self evaluation process.

4. The toolkit generated buy-in to the children's services planning process by supporting meaningful engagement

We heard from stakeholders involved in the core project groups about how the work had generated interest in children's services planning and improved the understanding of when/how partners could get involved. There was a feeling that this had increased the momentum towards better cross-sector working and stimulated thinking about where third sector partners could be involved earlier or lead specific areas of work.

“[The toolkit] enhanced clarity in when and how colleagues can get involved in children's services planning”

Core Project Team Member

Key to this has been the principles of good participation built into the process and the tool itself. The projects provided a clear purpose and approach to the work, and ensured that key stakeholders were informed and felt involved early on in the process. The fact the work had clear, tangible outcomes helped ensure buy-in as people could see the potential impact of their involvement from the outset. The engagement approach supported key stakeholders to work creatively by encouraging more active outreach to partners often not included in these conversations.

In Glasgow and Aberdeenshire, we spoke directly to key partners about the work at the outset, including through existing forums and networks. Involving key stakeholders at the early stages of the process appeared to give clarity on the approach, the intended purpose of the work and ultimately brought buy-in to the process as a whole.

Partners have also reflected that the engagement process provided a structured forum for identifying challenges and for collaborating on actions for improvement. Importantly, the structured, action-focused approach the tool provided has also given all partners confidence that the conversations were meaningful and could lead to real change.

These discussions have led to a better understanding of how the third sector feels about their role in children's services planning and also helped develop a shared understanding of the key role that third sector stakeholders could play within this. We also heard how the process helped identify barriers to participation that had not previously been understood.

The approach and attitude of partners involved in this improvement work has meant that engagement activity has offered a space where all participants can contribute as equal partners in this process. Ultimately, the engagement process has created opportunities where third sector partners feel valued and have felt heard. Longer term, partners felt there would be greater engagement with the Children's Services Planning process among their local third sector.

“[The project has] effectively enabled us to check out a collective view on what we are doing...ensuring that our structure is fully inclusive of TSOs [third sector organisations]...Even just meeting together as a collective to focus in on TSO participation has created opportunities for us to learn from each other, share knowledge, and gain collective understanding of where we are and where we want to be”

Core Project Team Member

“[The project has] given them [third sector partners] a voice, and supported them to feel respected and heard”

Core Project Team Member

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5. The toolkit’s holistic, adaptable approach allows it to be tailored to the needs of the user – but a clear purpose is required to have impact

The flexibility of the tool means it can be responsive to the local context and issues partners identify as their priority areas. This was a key strength across the three areas where we provide local support.

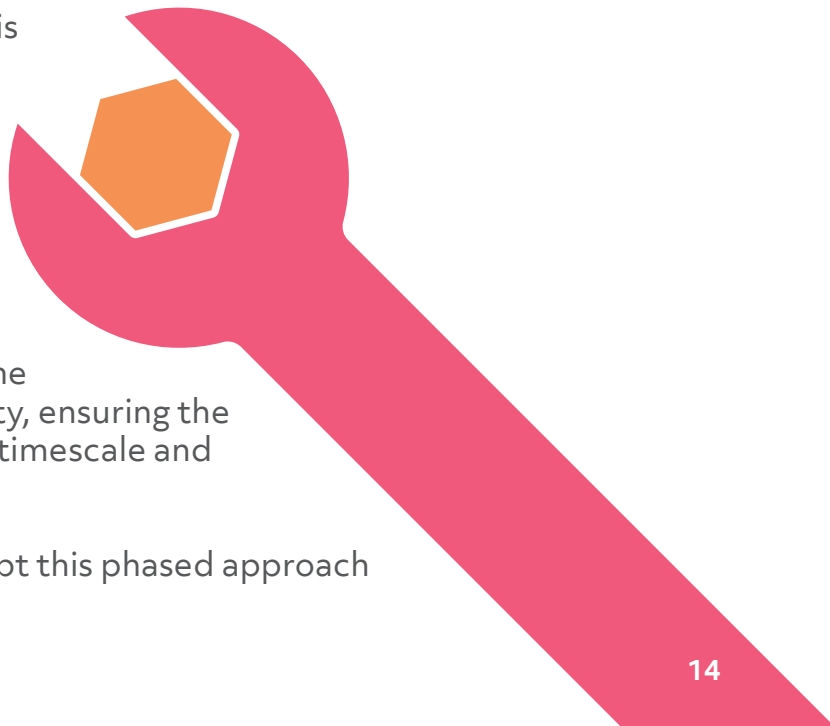
“I would highly recommend the tool to other Children’s Services Planning Partnerships looking to enhance third sector involvement in children’s services planning. It provides a structured and reflective approach that can be tailored to different local contexts”

Core Project Team Member

While taking a holistic approach is valuable, it is also vital that CSPPs are clear in what sections of the tool they want to use, how they approach their engagement with partners and how this will link to their improvement plan.

It is important to reiterate that we feel it is sensible to approach use of the tool in a cyclical manner - identifying an area of the tool to start with and then revisiting the other areas of focus in the future. This was the approach used across the three localities involved in 2024-25. This allowed for focused work on key topics that were of relevance, rather than trying to undertake a self-evaluation of the whole system. This helped to focus activity, ensuring the work could be delivered within a realistic timescale and providing clear outcomes for all partners.

We would encourage other CSPPs to adopt this phased approach to self-evaluation.





5. Recommendations and future support to make use of the 'How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?' toolkit

This report provides guidance to CSPPs in making use of the '*How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?*' toolkit. The content is based on our experience of providing support to make use of the tool in three localities across 2024-25.

We want to thank Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Glasgow for their willingness to get involved as early adopters of the tool. We look forward to seeing the three localities implement their improvement plans.

We have valued working closely with partners across the three localities to consider how we can meaningfully make improvements to ensure high quality, meaningful involvement of the third sector in children's services planning. These project groups across each locality have been key in driving the work forward.

Moving forwards, the STTS Project will continue to provide bespoke support to local CSPPs. This may include supporting the use of the self-evaluation toolkit, however we also hope to provide support on a wider range of issues, particularly as localities head into the final phase of developing their 2026-2029 Children's Services Plan.

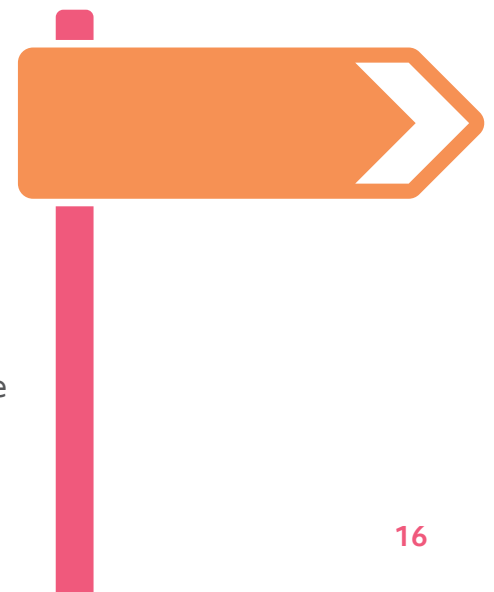
We will cascade the learning shared in this report through a number of routes, including supporting localities to share their experiences of using the toolkit. Key routes for this will include through the TSI Children's Services Network and the Children's Services Strategic Leads Network facilitated by Scottish Government. We are also happy to work with partners to identify other routes for sharing the learning included in this report.

Finally, we have provided a series of recommendations for using the '*How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?*' toolkit. We hope that alongside the learning shared in this report, and the practical guidance on how to use the tool, these will provide a strong basis for CSPPs to undertake the self-evaluation process.

Recommendations

1. Clearly define the project group responsible for taking the work forward, including roles and responsibilities across this group. This support proactive project management, effective session planning and ongoing ownership.
2. Good outreach at the planning stage is essential to generate participation and support from across the CSPP. This includes engaging with leadership within the local authority to ensure agreement is in place to undertake joint work and progress any improvement activity developed through the process. It also includes ensuring that those who may not ordinarily be involved in work like this can participate as equal partners.

3. Positive, meaningful and respectful engagement is key to the successful use of the toolkit.
 - a. Key stakeholders should approach the work with a commitment to meaningfully taking forward the learning from the work and should demonstrate this through their engagement with key partners – this process is about people’s thoughts and experiences of the children’s services planning process as it is about the system. Understanding how people experience the structures in place is a key source of evidence
 - b. We encourage localities to take the time at the outset of the project to highlight the importance of a respectful approach to participation. We have referred to Children in Scotland values: collaborative, kind, open and honest, brave to support with this. You will likely have your own framework which can support this
 - c. From the outset, clearly outline where you want to get to and how the process will get you there. This gives clarity on how participating will lead to real change
 - d. Finally, have a clear plan for how the work will feed into longer term planning and work across the CSPP to ensure the impact of the work is sustained.
4. It is important to get the right people in the room. Attendees in engagement should have a good understanding of the children’s services planning process, and a certain level of prior engagement with planning processes is valuable. It is important however to consider how to involve other partners with less experience of the planning process to ensure their views are also represented. Additional outreach or development work may be required.
5. We recommend sending a briefing paper and a video resource which summarizes the tool to partners in each locality in advance of the engagement sessions. These resources were useful to generate buy-in from potential attendees at the sessions, and to support people’s understanding of the aims and objectives of the tool and of the sessions. The video was particularly useful because it was accessible to attendees with multiple demands on their time.
6. Attendees valued being in person, and having time at the start of the event for networking/ catching up with colleagues/ meeting new partners working in overlapping areas. We recommend holding events in person where possible, and assigning specific time for networking in the schedule, to ensure that attendees can access the full benefits of in-person events without encroaching on time needed for using the tool.
7. We recommend setting aside time at the start of engagement sessions to summarize the structure of children’s services planning in the locality. Attendees will have good knowledge of the part of the system they interact with, but it is important not to assume knowledge of the whole system. This input also helped frame the purpose of the day: to examine processes and planning, not day-to-day service provision. Many people in children’s services are under extreme pressure and, as a result, can tend to focus on frontline challenges i.e. service delivery. Taking the time to encourage attendees to focus on planning can counteract this tendency.



8. All localities chose to work on Area 2: Strategic planning and delivery of services. For all localities this appeared to be the most natural starting point, and may in fact be the necessary starting point in order to have productive conversations about A1 (Leadership) and A3 (Measuring success and demonstrating impact). We would encourage all localities using the tool to carefully consider the most appropriate starting point for their context.
9. The voices of children, young people, and families have not been a significant part of this work, because the focus of the tool is on planning, not service delivery. However, participants should keep these voices to the forefront in discussions on planning, to ensure that the needs, priorities, and concerns of children, young people and families are at the center of children's services planning.