

# **The Promise Progress Framework December 2025 update – Chief Statistician message to accompany update**

## **Interpreting Progress Responsibly: Our Approach to Quality and Transparency in the Promise Progress Framework**

### **A Shared Commitment to Keeping the Promise**

As Chief Statistician, I want to provide some comments on the development of The Promise Progress Framework. Here I have laid out some next steps that I consider are important to delivering trusted quality evidence on progress and supports using statistics for the public good.

The Promise commitment underpins Scotland's ambition to ensure every child grows up feeling loved, safe and respected. Delivering on this ambition spans many aspects of our children, young people and adults' lives, and requires a broad coalition of people and organisations to come together. It is a high-profile policy area and progress reporting will come under increasing scrutiny.

The Promise Progress Framework provides a key part of the mechanism to monitor and evaluate progress. It is vital that it is a trusted component in evaluating progress, which can only be achieved by demonstrating robust, independent and transparent processes in its formation and reporting. In turn, following these processes, this will help to gain a common and shared interpretation between all stakeholders, offering a national-level picture of progress against the outcomes agreed by all.

The Code of Practice for Statistics is a good starting point to guide us in upholding Trustworthiness, Quality and Value in the Framework as is the practical application of the National Performance Framework in monitoring progress against National Outcomes.

### **A Transparent QA Process**

To support the first update to the Promise Progress Framework since it was published in December 2024, I recommended a quality assurance approach similar to that used for the National Performance Framework.

Drawing on the experience of that process and the expertise of lead analysts who support NPF is a starting point that can provide the robust and independent scrutiny required to gain trustworthiness, quality and value of the Promise Progress Framework. Regularly publishing what is being updated, why and associated technical background reports helps this process to be transparent.

The NPF Technical Advisory Group have supported the Promise Progress Framework, and I thank them and the Promise team for providing this quality assurance. The NPF-TAG, consisting of a panel of senior analytical experts within government, provide a broad range of knowledge from a diverse portfolio of policy areas.

Their role has provided:

- Robust quality assurance – checking that recommendations from lead analysts are accurate and align with best analytical practice.
- Consistency across indicators – ensuring broader consistency across the whole framework, guided by shared principles.
- Objective scrutiny – bringing a broader perspective from those not embedded in these policy areas, helping ensure interpretations are accessible to anyone with an interest in The Promise.

A quality assurance paper will be published alongside the framework for those who want to explore the outputs from their considerations more carefully and assure themselves of the diligence that this process provides.

This is the first stage of an iterative process, and from the advice of the Technical Advisory Group further developments for 2026 in reporting progress are outlined below.

### **Next steps**

It is important that we take all steps necessary to ensure the trustworthiness, quality and value reporting from the framework. This is vital to pre-emptively address issues that may arise from publishing the framework to support scrutiny of this key Government and cross partner commitment.

Drawing on the experience of the National Performance Framework and work done by the NPF-TAG is a successful well-trodden route to meeting that need. The NPF-TAG demonstrated successfully how we can bridge that gap.

This should continue and I am recommending that in 2026 a Technical Advisory Group to provide on-going support to the Promise Progress Framework be established. Work has begun to set up this process and identify membership of the group; consideration should be given to how this can be sustained and continue to provide advice into 2026 and beyond.

The initial set of indicators have been created by stakeholders who are delivering services and policies to support The Promise. Following best practice this should be expanded to take into account a wider range of views and included expert advice via TAG. The NPF-TAG have raised recommendations for the follow-on group including:

### **Default baseline**

At the start of this process, the default baseline for indicators within the Promise Progress Framework was set to 2020 with principles set out for where an alternative is appropriate. However, throughout the quality assurance process NPF-TAG members have advised that this default be changed to 2019, with the same flexibility around data publication schedules/time series availability. The rationale for this is:

- Whether there have been disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic or not, a pre-2020 data point in each timeseries makes it easier for users to interpret actual progress from a point in time free from the impacts of the pandemic.
- Including a pre-COVID data point across the board also means that as time series are updated, we do not need to continually revisit whether or not the 2020 figure was “sufficiently” impacted by COVID for it to be considered an unsuitable baseline.
- Applying this consistently across all indicators also avoids any perception that the selection of pre-COVID data points has been done based on whether they emphasise or minimise progress made since 2020 and will help to improve the public trust in this important document designed to allow scrutiny.

Co-authors of the Story of Progress, with advice from lead analysts and The Promise TAG, should consider how these indicators are developed or revised in the future to provide a rounded Framework that can provide a complete picture of progress.

#### Inclusion of longer-term trends in supporting narrative

Initially, lead analysts were asked to include any assessment of longer-term trends in their proposed supporting narrative, where appropriate. However, in practice this approach has posed several issues:

- These assessments are difficult to properly contextualise within the word limit constraints of the dashboard format.
- In addition, once again, having a consistent approach across indicators minimises the risk of any perception that only certain trends are being highlighted because they reflect positively on progress since the baseline.

For these reasons, the TAG has recommended that the supporting narrative around each indicator focus solely on trends since the baseline. It is my recommendation that this group considers whether a report looking at longer term progress against these outcomes, potentially commissioned through an objective outsider, would be a better way to capture and communicate this with users.

#### **Looking Ahead**

This update marks the first step in an iterative process. With strong foundations in place, I look forward to working with co-authors of the framework in 2026 and beyond to ensure it remains valuable, and responsive to emerging data sources. As part of the Promise Data and Evidence Group's work, a full review of indicators will take place in 2026.

I ask that these issues are given due consideration during that review and, in conjunction with the quality assurance paper and feedback here, these matters are kept under review to ensure the framework remains an instrumental tool in our work to keep The Promise.