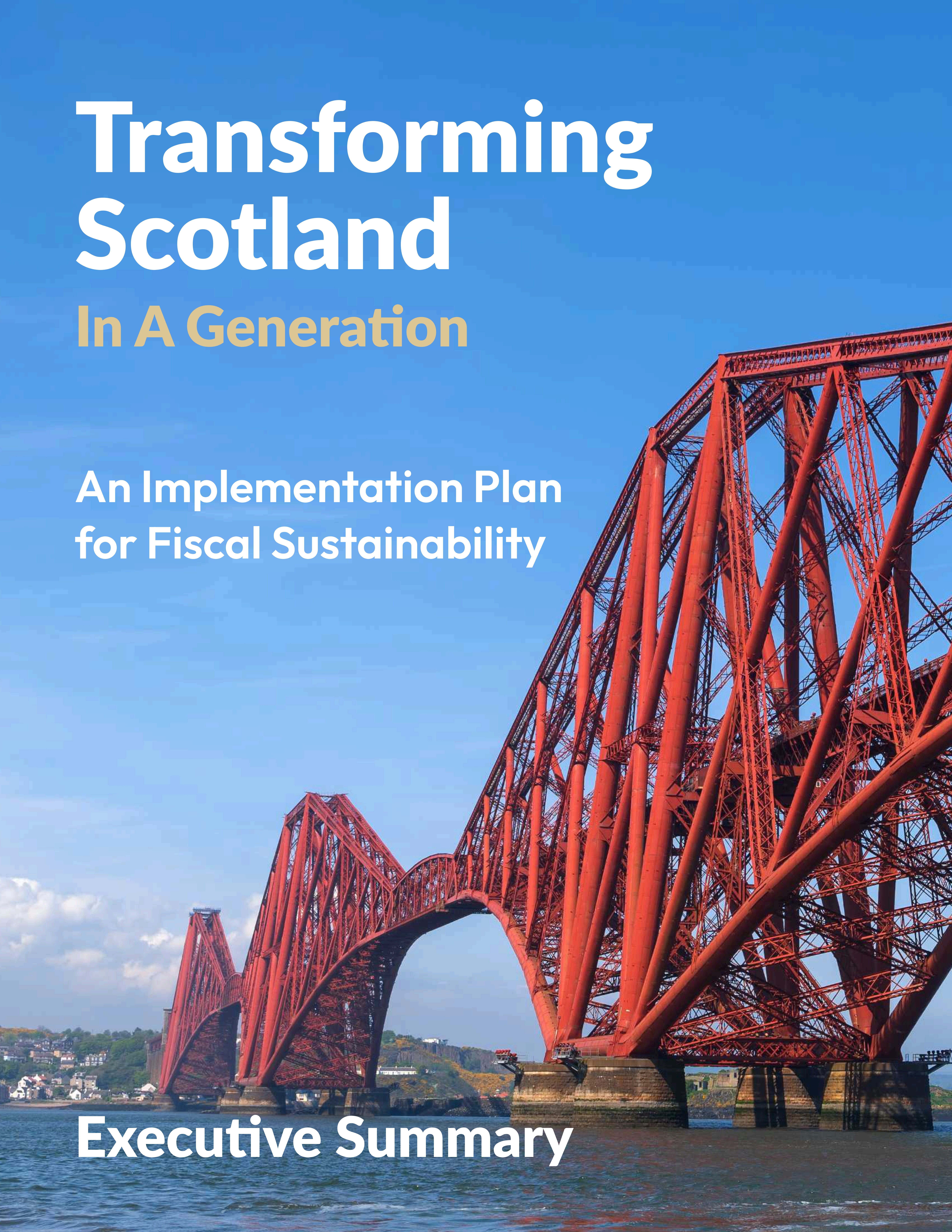


# Transforming Scotland

## In A Generation

An Implementation Plan  
for Fiscal Sustainability

Executive Summary



***“It is easier to build strong children, than to repair broken men”***

Frederick Douglass, former slave who helped end slavery in the United States

***“The welfare of today's children is inseparably linked to the peace of tomorrow's world”***

Henry Labouisse, former Executive Director of UNICEF

***“For better or for worse the world can be revolutionised in one generation according to how we deal with the children”***

Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, and drafter of the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

***“What's done to children, they will do to society”***

Dr Karl Menninger, psychiatrist

***“Society prospers, and is an enriching environment in which to live, according to the nature of its citizens. ... The groundwork for good citizenship occurs in the first 1001 days. A society which delivers this for its children creates a strong foundation for almost every aspect of its future. A society which fails to deliver it generates enormous problems for the future”***

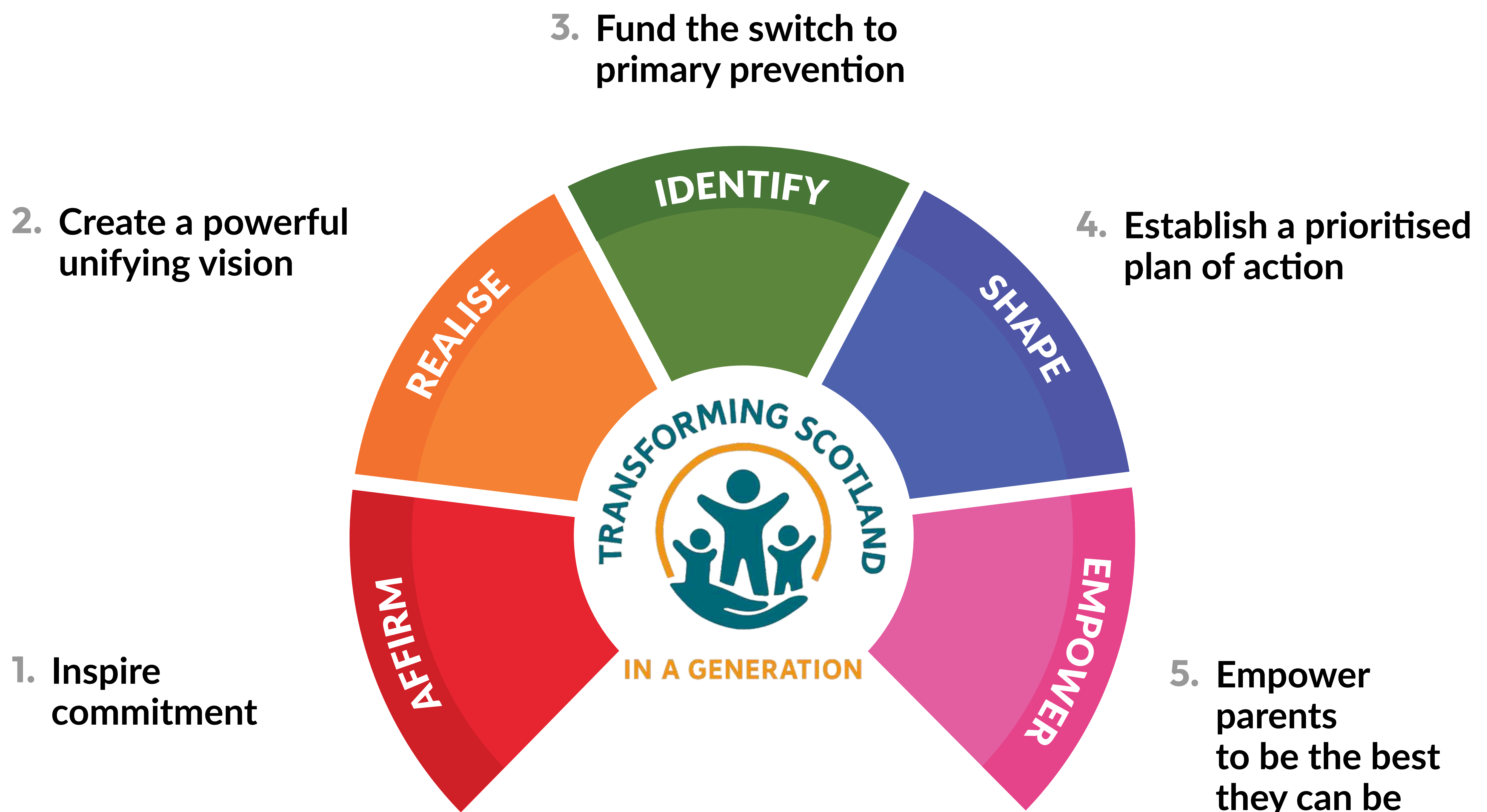
Tim Loughton MP, former UK Children's Minister, Building Great Britons

***“I and the public know  
What all school children learn,  
Those to whom evil is done  
Do evil in return”***

WH Auden (1 September 1939, from 'Another Time')

# The A.R.I.S.E. Local Area Transformation Blueprint

## How Transformation is Delivered Locally



## Executive Summary May 2026

Report of the Cross-Party Commission of Inquiry into Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences



Chair  
Sir Harry Burns



Vice-Chair  
George Hosking OBE

## Executive Summary

**Scotland's most persistent and costly social challenges are not inevitable. This report sets out the practical means to transform them: strengthening the earliest foundations of life, particularly through secure attachment between parent and child; increasing public expenditure upstream; and building a stronger, more fiscally sustainable Scotland in one generation.**

Transforming Scotland in a Generation was developed in response to a brief from a Cross Party Group of the Scottish Parliament, which established a Commission of Inquiry to develop **an action plan to reduce child maltreatment by 70% by 2030.**

Through its work, the Commission recognised that its proposals to prevent adverse childhood experiences at scale would achieve the 70/30 goal for future generations.

It also identified another parallel and previously unrecognised pathway to negative life outcomes, rooted in deficits in four key foundational skills. Addressed alongside the prevention of adverse childhood experiences, **these two approaches, working in parallel, have the potential to transform Scotland's social and economic future.** Hence the project was renamed 'Transforming Scotland in a Generation'.

Over a four-year period, the Commission took oral evidence from 30 expert contributors - leading international prevention scientists, senior UK experts, and Scottish practitioners with deep field experience - and reviewed hundreds of written submissions.

Across this evidence, a consistent conclusion emerged. **Many of the conditions that drive Scotland's most persistent and costly social challenges**, including poor health, low educational attainment, crime, addiction and welfare dependency, **are not inevitable.** They are, to a significant extent, preventable, with potentially transformational benefit to the fiscal health of both national and local government, along with Scotland's NHS.

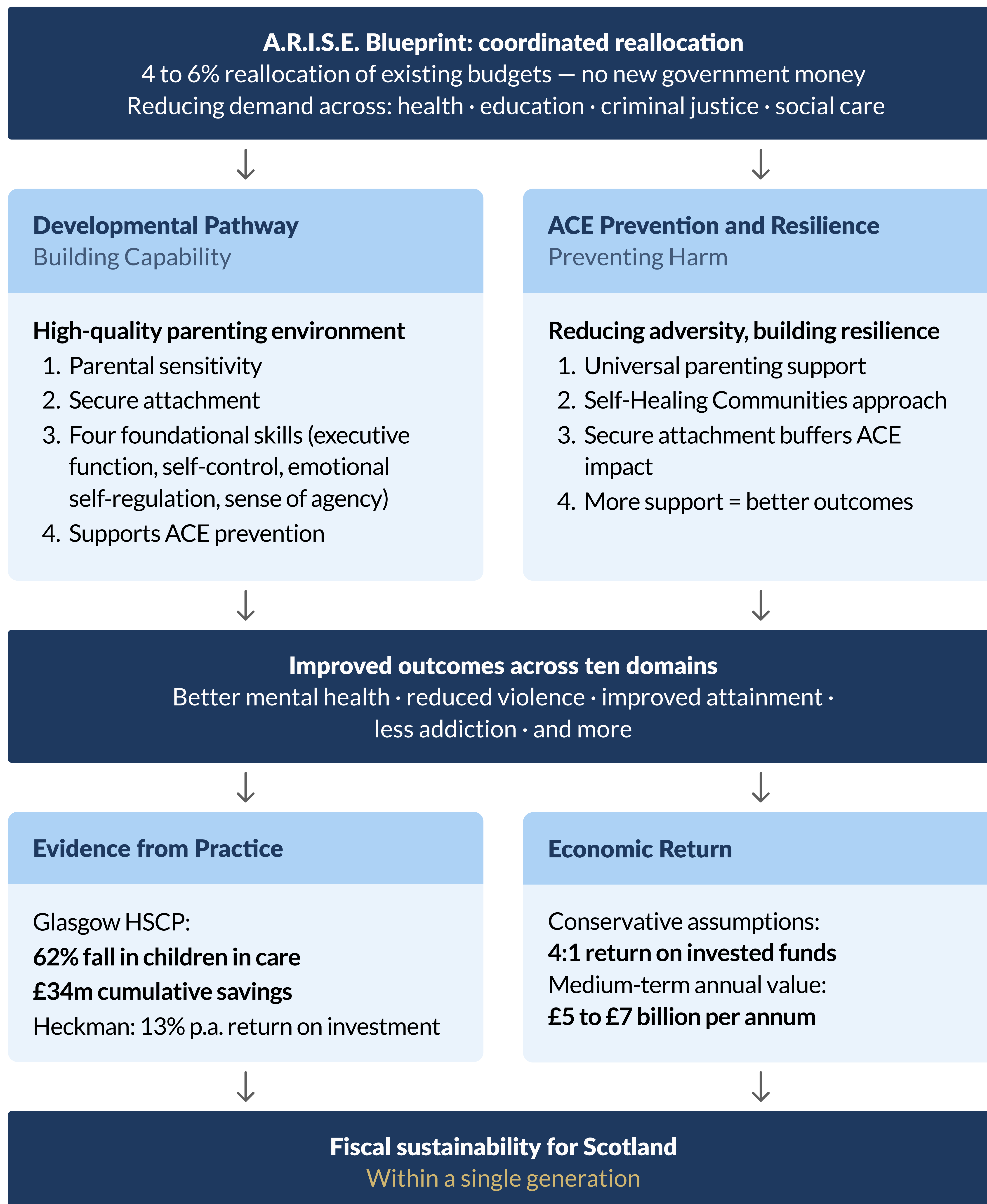
In parallel with our work, evidence shared by the Scottish Government and Audit Scotland has made clear that Scotland faces a growing structural challenge. Demand on public services is rising at a faster rate than available resources can meet, now or in the future. This is placing sustained pressure on local authorities and NHS Boards. Without a fundamental shift in approach, this imbalance will continue to deepen.

**The conclusions of the Commission align directly with the ambitions of Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy, Population Health Framework and Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework.** These recognise the need to move beyond managing the consequences of social and health challenges, towards addressing their root causes.

This report provides a **practical implementation blueprint** for doing so. By strengthening the earliest foundations of life, it sets out how Scotland can progressively reduce long-term demand on public services, establish a more sustainable balance between need and resource, and **build a stronger economy with significantly lower levels of child maltreatment, poverty and inequality**, all within a single generation.

## Diagram A: The Solution

Every connection shown represents robust research evidence of significant association



The evidence underpinning these estimates is summarised in the accompanying Summary Report (Part 2a) and will be presented in detail in the Full Report and Evidence (Part 2b).

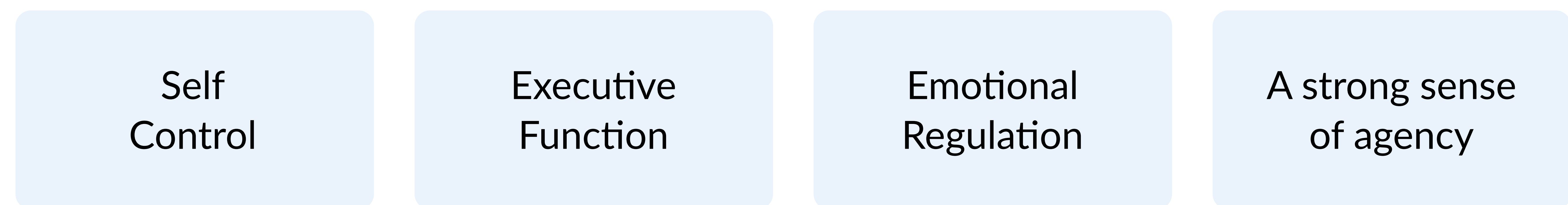
In practical terms, this means more parents receiving support before family stress becomes crisis; more children arriving at school able to learn, relate and regulate; fewer families reaching statutory thresholds; and fewer young people entering the costly downstream systems that currently absorb public spending, while leading safer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

## The Developmental Pathway: A Structural Insight

*Early deficits in secure attachment and four foundational skills drive Scotland's most persistent and costly social challenges.*

The Commission identified a clear and outcome-shaping developmental pathway.

**Early parental sensitivity fosters secure attachment. Secure attachment, in turn, develops four foundational capabilities:**



These four skills underpin educational attainment, employability, mental health, resilience and pro-social behaviour. When they are weak, the likelihood of involvement in crime, addiction, violence, mental ill-health, school exclusion and welfare dependency rises sharply.

This integrated pathway is directly linked to many of Scotland's most persistent and costly social challenges. It therefore provides a coherent framework for prevention-led reform. Strengthening this pathway from pregnancy through the early years would reshape the developmental conditions that currently drive long-term demand across multiple public services.

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## From Strategy To Implementation: Rebalancing Investment Upstream

*Scotland does not need new money: it needs to redirect 4 to 6% of existing budgets from reactive spending to developmental prevention.*

This report sets out a practical means by which Scotland can begin to shift from managing the consequences of social and health challenges **to addressing their root causes.**

In many parts of the public sector, the prevailing view is that prevention cannot be implemented at scale because resources are already fully committed to meeting immediate statutory demands.

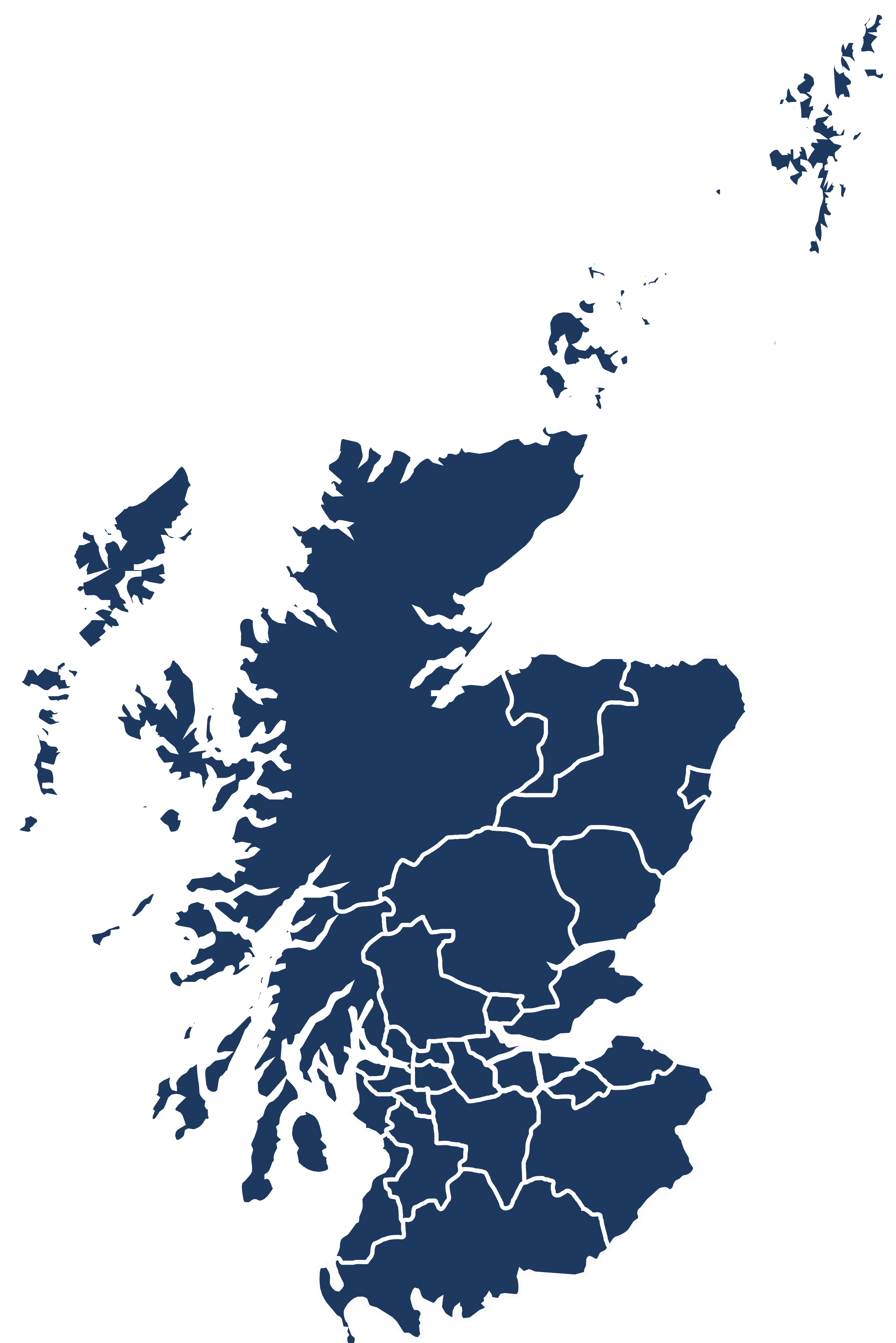
The Commission's analysis suggests that the central challenge is not simply the level of resources, but how those resources are currently allocated. This requires a shift in focus from how to deliver existing services more efficiently, towards how to allocate resources more effectively to achieve the greatest long-term impact. At its core is a disciplined and progressive reallocation of a relatively small proportion of existing public expenditure. Specifically, Scotland **would reallocate 4 to 6 percent of statutory spending from lower impact reactive activity into higher impact developmental primary prevention over a period of 4 to 5 years.**

This is not additional spending, nor is it a blanket reduction in existing services. It is a managed rebalancing within existing budgets, designed to maintain service stability while progressively shifting investment upstream.

**Each local area would develop, within 18 months, a costed Local Prevention Action Plan.** This would identify specific areas of reactive expenditure that can be reduced over time, alongside corresponding preventive investments to be strengthened. The process would be transparent, evidence-led, and subject to clear reporting, ensuring a controlled and accountable transition.

**Such reallocation requires strong leadership, careful sequencing and sustained focus. However, it is achievable.**

Experience from more than two decades of cost re-engineering in complex organisations operating under financial pressure demonstrates that significant reprioritisation can be delivered without destabilising core services, when guided by clear evidence and disciplined implementation.



**The A.R.I.S.E. Blueprint, set out in Section 19, provides the structured approach through which this transition can be planned and delivered at both national and local level.**

## Poverty Reduction And Economic Strength

**Quality of relationships shapes life outcomes more strongly than income alone; addressing both in parallel delivers the greatest impact.**

The Commission's analysis indicates that both material and relational factors shape long-term life outcomes, but not equally. Three major studies: the Millennium Cohort Study (19,500 children), Bethell et al. (131,774 children), and Bellis et al. (7,047 adults), all found that relational factors have about 1.8 times the impact of material factors on child outcomes.

**The strongest outcomes occur when both poverty and the relational factors that embed it, such as deficits in key social and emotional skills, are addressed together.**

The Transforming Scotland in a Generation Commission therefore advances a two-pronged and mutually reinforcing approach:

- Sustained structural support for families facing material hardship
- Relationship-centred investment in the developmental pathway from pregnancy onwards

This integrated approach is further supported by the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, whose research demonstrates the exceptional economic return generated by high-quality early intervention.

By strengthening early capability, Scotland can improve educational attainment, increase workforce participation and productivity, and expand the proportion of economically active, tax-contributing citizens, while reducing long-term benefit dependency.

**This is not an alternative to current anti-poverty policy; it is a strengthening of it.**

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## Universal Parenting Support

**Universal, evidence-based parenting support from pregnancy to school entry is the primary means to enable the development of secure attachment and the four foundational skills.**

To operationalise the developmental pathway, Scotland can **establish universal, evidence-based parenting education and support from pregnancy until the start of school** as a core public service function. This would be delivered proportionately, with greater intensity where need is highest.

There is now growing international consensus on this approach. At the Global Ministerial Conference in Madrid in January 2026, both **UNICEF and the World Health Organization called for all governments to adopt universal, evidence-based parenting support as a foundation for long-term societal wellbeing.** Scotland, with its leadership through GIRFEC and its early recognition of the impact of ACEs, is well placed to be at the forefront of this movement.

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## Building The Prevention Infrastructure

*Without five enabling conditions, prevention remains episodic rather than systemic.*

To make prevention sustained rather than episodic, Scotland requires a coherent supporting infrastructure:

1. **Embed a systematic focus on root causes** across statutory agencies.
2. **Establish continuity of relationships** as a core commissioning and service design principle.
3. **Strengthen workforce capability** through enhanced training and dedicated prevention capacity.
4. **Build strong local partnerships with community networks**, drawing on approaches proven to deliver cost-effective improvements in key outcomes, such as the **Washington State Self-Healing Communities model.**
5. **Implement routine national data collection** and reporting on key prevention indicators to support continuous improvement.

Each of these steps is supported by strong evidence and would significantly increase the impact of Scotland's existing policy initiatives.

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## Evidence From Practice

**Glasgow's experience demonstrates that reductions in downstream demand and cost can begin emerging earlier than commonly assumed.**

Experience in Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership demonstrates that **substantial reductions in downstream demand and cost are achievable when early prevention and family support are prioritised**, alongside measures to reduce material deprivation.

Importantly, reductions in demand and cost can begin to emerge earlier than commonly assumed, alongside longer-term improvements in outcomes.

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## Conclusion

***Transforming Scotland in a Generation is not a departure from Scotland's reform agenda. It is the structured means of delivering it.***

By embedding the developmental pathway, progressively rebalancing expenditure upstream, strengthening universal parenting support and aligning prevention infrastructure, Scotland can reduce avoidable demand on public services, **strengthen fiscal sustainability and build long-term economic strength.**

**The A.R.I.S.E. blueprint is offered in partnership** to support national and local leaders in translating strategic intent into measurable and sustained change at scale.

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## Five Key Commission Recommendations

*These five recommendations, taken together, constitute a complete and mutually reinforcing implementation system.*

The Commission of Inquiry makes five key recommendations to enable Scotland to deliver prevention-led reform at scale:

- 1 In alignment with the Public Service Reform Strategy and Population Health Framework, Scotland should **progressively reallocate 4–6% of statutory expenditure** from low-impact reactive spending into high-impact developmental primary prevention over 4 to 5 years, **shifting the focus of public services from reducing symptoms to addressing root causes.**

**2 Embed the developmental pathway** from parental sensitivity to secure attachment to the 4 foundational skills of executive function, self-control, emotional self-regulation and sense of agency as the guiding framework within Scotland's transformation agenda.

**3 Establish universal, evidence-based parenting support** from pregnancy to the beginning of school, with additional support for parents and carers with related issues, proportionate to need.

**4 Reduce child poverty through an integrated strategy** combining structural economic support with robust relationship-centred developmental investment.

**5 Build the enabling infrastructure** required for sustained prevention, including planning structures, strengthened workforce capability, community partnership, continuity of relationships, and outcome reporting aligned to prevention.



## Transforming Scotland In A Generation

Windyhill Farm,  
Newmilns,  
East Ayrshire,  
Scotland KA16 9LR

## Contact Details

**Tel:** +44 (0)1560 322 805  
+44 (0)7950 025880  
**E:** [office@wavetrust.org](mailto:office@wavetrust.org)  
**W:** [www.wavetrust.org](http://www.wavetrust.org)  
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