

Appropriate adult services: summary of national self-evaluation

July 2025



Introduction

This report provides a background to appropriate adult services across Scotland. It outlines the role of the Care Inspectorate and summarises the themes from our self-evaluation programme based on a Core Assurance approach. This report summarises the overall themes under the Core Assurance headings to highlight the strengths and areas for improvement identified by appropriate adult services within the self-evaluation submissions.

Between September and November 2024, we engaged with appropriate adult service leads and coordinators through a series of self-evaluation webinars. Following these sessions, we distributed the Core Assurances document to all 21 appropriate adult services across the 32 local authorities, achieving a 100% response rate.

Appropriate adult services

Appropriate adult services are provided to vulnerable people aged 16 and over who require support during police procedures. A person is deemed to be vulnerable if they need support to communicate effectively or understand sufficiently what is happening during police procedures. This need may be due to mental illness, personality disorder, learning disability or other cause.

The term people who require or receive support during police procedures refers to people who may have been the victim of a crime, witnessed a crime or be suspected of committing a crime. Police procedures may relate to formal interview or the gathering of biometric data such as DNA, fingerprints or photographs. When we use the term staff, it refers to all people working within the appropriate adult service regardless of their designation or status. For example, this may indicate a volunteer, self-employed person, or someone employed by the local authority.

Background

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 provides the enabling legislation within which appropriate adult services operate. The Act places particular requirements on a range of organisations to ensure the availability of a consistent and sustainable appropriate adult service:

- Section 42 of the 2016 Act places a duty on the police to facilitate support for people in their custody who are defined as 'vulnerable'.
- Section 99 of the 2016 Act places a duty on local authorities to provide an appropriate adult service when it is required.

[Statutory Guidance for local authorities](#) was first published by the Scottish Government on 10 January 2020. Local authorities must have regard to this and any subsequent guidance when undertaking their appropriate adult functions.

The Scottish Government also created a non-statutory oversight structure to further promote consistency, quality, and sustainability of appropriate adult provision at a national level.

- Section 100 of the 2016 Act enabled the Scottish Government to confer the duty to assess the quality of appropriate adult services to the Care Inspectorate.

Care Inspectorate role

As the national body responsible for the scrutiny, assurance and improvement of social care and social work in Scotland the Care Inspectorate was tasked by the Scottish Government to produce [a quality improvement framework to support self-evaluation of appropriate adult services in Scotland](#).

A self-evaluation model informed by quality indicators offers opportunities for local authorities, their partners, and commissioned services to gauge the extent to which they are delivering a consistent and sustainable appropriate adult service.

National context

The Care Inspectorate attends and provides regular updates on our activities to the appropriate adult National Oversight Group. Chaired by a representative from the Mental Welfare Commission, the group consists of a range of local and national stakeholders as well as third sector organisations representing people who use services. It sets and oversees the direction of appropriate adult policies at a national level.

An appropriate adult national coordinator, hosted by COSLA acts as the main point of contact for appropriate adult services and the Care Inspectorate. The national coordinator provides advice and guidance to local services, practitioner forums and attends the appropriate adult national oversight group. The national coordinator also informs policy development in relation to appropriate adults.

National self-evaluation using a Core Assurance approach

Following the launch of the appropriate adult quality improvement framework in November 2023 the Care Inspectorate collaborated with a number of services to develop and test an initial approach to support self-evaluation. After testing and amendments informed by feedback, we produced a Core Assurance template with accompanying guidance and exemplar to help guide services.

We know there are key elements essential to a service operating legally and safely in line with statutory responsibilities. The Core Assurances draw from the quality improvement framework. The template includes the key elements that should be considered and taken account of when delivering/ commissioning an appropriate adult service.

Reviewing the Core Assurances is the starting point for self-evaluation. It is the first step in gauging how effectively an appropriate adult service is performing. Completion of the template helps provide

a baseline for how services are performing. It should be revisited as a service progresses with their continuous improvement journey.

The Care Inspectorate's approach to scrutiny, assurance and quality improvement is informed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. The model incorporates three core tenets related to Direction, Execution and Results.

The Core Assurance template is structured around these three tenets:

- DIRECTION: questions on governance, legal compliance, wider strategic vision and direction
- EXECUTION: questions on leadership and implementation of key processes
- RESULTS: the extent to which intended outcomes are achieved as well as priorities for improvement.

In August 2024 we invited appropriate adult service leads from across Scotland to join a series of interactive webinars to support self-evaluation using a Core Assurances approach. The well attended webinars were delivered between September and November 2024.

As well as aiming to build confidence in undertaking self-evaluation, the webinar content reiterated the following points from the quality improvement framework:

- self-evaluation is central to continuous improvement
- self-evaluation helps appropriate adult services know how well they are doing
- self-evaluation helps to identify the best ways to improve the service.

Services were asked to complete and submit their Core Assurance template to us by 28 February 2025. While a small number of submissions were delayed for acceptable reasons such as sign off by oversight committees, a 100% response rate was achieved.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to all 21 appropriate adult services across the 32 local authority areas, their staff and partners who made time to analyse and reflect on their practice in order to complete the Core Assurances for their area.

In addition, we would like to thank the pilot areas for their proactive interest in testing new ways of working and their commitment to continuous improvement.

Engagement with partners

A small number of submissions also outlined where a partnership approach had been undertaken in the completion of the Core Assurances template. In such instances this enabled services to meaningfully capture the views of Police Scotland partners, staff delivering services and

representatives from national groups such as Scottish Appropriate Adult Network (SAAN) and the National Appropriate Adult co-ordinator (hosted by COSLA).

Feedback on the approach

Positive, unsolicited feedback from the sector confirmed the approach was well received as illustrated by the comments below:

'(We) very much enjoyed the experience of getting to work through and evidence our good works and picking up areas (we) are keen to improve upon'

'...national self-evaluation using Core Assurances...our executive team became animated... thank you very much for helping our service be recognised for the work we do.'

'... how beneficial the Core Assurances submission was in focussing on the service ...'.

'The self-evaluation process has highlighted some key areas...to improve the overall appropriate adult service.'

Summary of themes

We asked services to consider and respond to the eight key elements within the Core Assurance template. The following summary is an overview of the themes following our analysis of submissions. Examples of improvement priorities identified by services are also highlighted for wider interest.

As of May 2025 there were 21 appropriate adult services operating across Scotland, with the majority delivered by local authorities. Services operating across the three Ayrshire local authorities, the three Tayside local authorities and Argyll and Bute are commissioned by local authorities from third sector partners, namely TAAS (the Appropriate Adult Service) and Carr Gorm. The Highland service is NHS based.

Appropriate adult services

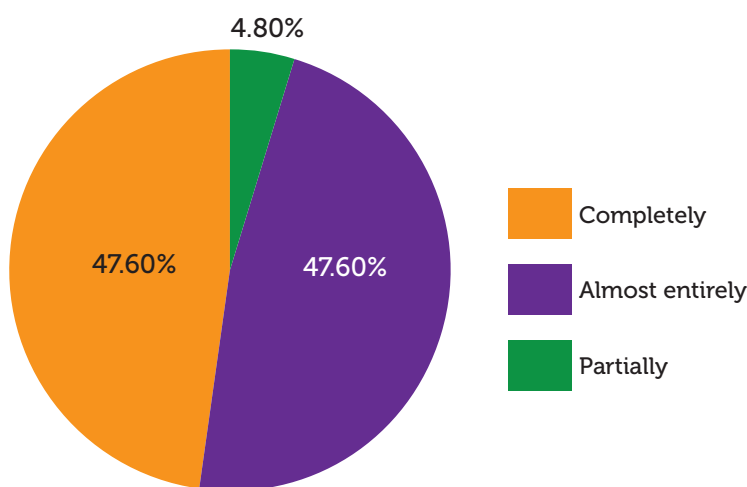


Governance

Each service provided information on their governance arrangements. Responses varied in detail and style, from descriptive narrative to inclusion of an organisational structure chart. Oversight of appropriate adult services differed depending on local arrangements with responsibility sitting across a range of local authority and Health and Social Care Partnership strategic groups.

There was a high degree of confidence within submissions that effective governance supported services to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. This was irrespective of the variance in governance arrangements.

Confidence



- There were strong links to Adult Support and Public Protection committees.
- A number of submissions highlighted the important collective and multi-agency ownership of appropriate adult services offered by these committees.
- Several submissions included useful detail on the connections between governance arrangements and other cross-cutting strategic groups such as Community Justice Partnerships.

Identified areas for improvement

- In a small number of instances overall governance arrangements were still being refined and yet to be finalised. This was reflected in the partial confidence ratings.

Performance

The efficiency of service performance was highlighted within a number of submissions with services noting either a 100% or very high response rate to requests for an appropriate adult. This was a significant strength. This achievement was attributed to a range of bespoke call handling and information systems. Services also recognised the efficiency and effectiveness of their staff rotas.

Services were proud of operating a comprehensive 24/7, 365-day provision, even across remote and rural areas with geographical challenges. Out of Hours Social Work Services were crucial to the responsiveness of these whole day arrangements. There were examples of larger services often extending support across local authority boundaries to maintain a stable service.

- Performance reporting included:
 - monthly collation of data for co-ordination groups
 - quarterly reports to leadership or governance groups
 - annual data submission to Scottish Appropriate Adult Network (SAAN) who produce a statistical report for the sector.

Leadership

Submissions referenced day to day operational leadership as sitting with local co-ordinators many of whom also held adult support and protection responsibilities.

- Co-ordinator groups played a key role in operational leadership by providing opportunities for discussion and promoting a 'safe to challenge' culture.
- Regular multi-agency forums supported effective collaboration, communication and sharing of feedback between colleagues and Police Scotland partners. Communicating and sharing feedback in such a way promoted opportunities to achieve positive change.
- Larger areas and regional networks were creatively used to engage practitioners online and in person. This often included collaboration with third sector partners engaging with people with living experience to inform effective leadership.
- Reviewing operational guidance at agreed intervals was recognised as important to ensuring currency and clarity of procedures. This was also viewed as important in monitoring or escalating identified risks.
- For commissioned services, regular contact with commissioners, partners and operational managers was reported as providing effective strategic and operational leadership.
- Oversight of performance was recognised as an important aspect of leadership groups at all levels including for commissioned and out of hours services.
- Several submissions referenced seeking guidance from the national coordinator. This was often in instances where interpretations of legislation or national guidance were important to ensuring consistency of practice.

Identified areas for improvement

- Strengthening performance reporting using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assure sufficient oversight and ensure routine quality assurance was highlighted by some areas.
- Strengthening links with Police Scotland, particularly where there had been changes in officers and gathering structured feedback from Police colleagues to inform outcome reporting were also noted.
- Updating lone working policies also featured.
- Several submissions recognised a need to strengthen and make connections to wider Community Justice services more explicit.

Safe staffing, and learning and development

It was encouraging to see such positive reflections on, and clear commitment to, supporting staff within Core Assurance submissions.

Recruitment

- Almost all services were confident staff were recruited safely in line with local policy. This included completion of PVG/disclosure checks prior to starting the role.
- There is currently no requirement for appropriate adults to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). That said, services using social work or social care staff in an appropriate adult role highlighted staff registration with a professional body as a strength within their self-evaluations.

Training

- Training for all staff was a key priority for all services.
- Completion of a specific local induction for appropriate adults was a significant strength highlighted within submissions.
- The core and refresher training offered by SAAN was noted as an important and consistent source of learning and development for appropriate adults.
- Online links were also used by some staff to access previously commissioned national training developed by West Lothian College.
- A number of services referenced access to a range of additional resources to help develop wider awareness of issues such as mental health, neurodiversity, speech and language development and trauma awareness.

Learning network

- Geographical networks of local authorities enabled services to leverage available resources to develop training and share practice-based learning. Such arrangements also fostered collaboration through discussions on local events and scenarios.

Identified areas for improvement

- The majority of services identified a need to carry out a detailed training needs analysis for their staff team. This was with a view to supporting development of a structured and targeted training programme.
- Reflecting a national theme for social care and social work, recruitment was also noted as a priority. Needs related to securing a sufficient number of appropriate adults to ensure efficient service delivery or achieving a gender balance of available staff.

Public protection

There was similar recognition of, and commitment to, ensuring staff were suitably aware, trained and supported in relation to public protection procedures.

- In particular, access to Adult Support and Protection training and knowledge was recognised as a significant strength by almost all areas.
- Established and well tested procedures for sharing concerns with partner agencies were referenced by all services.
- There was an overall confidence in staff understanding and use of recording to share and document ASP information appropriately.
- A number of services were alert to the requirements of young people aged 16 – 18 requiring appropriate adult support during a police process. Awareness of child protection procedures were therefore recognised as a relevant training need.

Recording and reporting systems

Core Assurance submissions noted the importance of compliance with general data protection regulations (GDPR) in relation to record collection and management. This demonstrated a clear awareness of the importance of legal and proportionate information sharing.

- While there is no standardised national information gathering and reporting system, services reported capturing and maintaining data and records in line with local arrangements, using a variety of electronic databases.

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- Reference was also made to sharing quantitative data with SAAN to inform their annual report.
 - While some submissions referenced quality assurance processes the majority did not. Where processes were in place, submissions often lacked sufficient detail to comment on their impact or usefulness.

Identified areas for improvement

- The Core Assurances approach enabled services to identify a number of areas for improvement. Examples related to:
 - developing feedback processes for partners and people using the service
 - developing quality assurance and auditing systems to analyse appropriate adult records and reports.

Complaints

Almost all services used their local complaints policy and procedures as a process for managing complaints against appropriate adult services. Most indicated that the procedures were untested for appropriate adults due to nil complaints reported.

Next steps

Every appropriate adult service in Scotland has now undertaken self-evaluation using the Core Assurance template and exemplar for guidance. Each service has highlighted their strengths and identified actions to inform continuous improvement. These actions should now be used to inform a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound) quality improvement plan or as an addition to any other pre-existing local improvement activities.

Reviewing the Core Assurance submissions enabled us to consider overall confidence in undertaking self-evaluation and what other activities may assist in embedding self-evaluation. We also now have a better understanding of local and national priorities. This will help guide our future work and how best to use our available resource. Support is available from our dedicated appropriate adult improvement lead who works in collaboration with our strategic justice team. Each local authority also has a Care Inspectorate link inspector who is well placed to support self-evaluation and the progress of quality improvement plans.

For the remainder of 2025 we will engage with link inspector colleagues, local appropriate adult services and national stakeholders. This is with a view to sharing learning from the self-evaluation Core Assurance submissions and agreeing how best to support services to deliver on their continuous improvement intentions. We will continue to provide regular updates on our work to the appropriate adult national oversight group.

Appendix 1 – Quality Improvement Framework (indicators)

What key outcomes have we achieved?	How well do we meet the needs of stakeholders?	How good is our delivery of our appropriate adult Service?	How good is our management?	How good is our leadership?
1. Key performance outcomes	2. Impact on people	5. Delivery of key processes	6. Policy, service development, planning and improvement	9. Leadership and direction
1.1 Improved outcomes for people who are supported by the appropriate adults service	2.1 People experience improved communication and understanding during police procedures	5.1 Providing help and support when it is needed	6.1 Policies and legal measures	9.1 Vision, values and aims
		5.2 Recognising and responding to risk and need	6.2 Planning and improving services	9.2 Leadership of people
		5.3 Involving people with experience of appropriate adults service	6.3 Performance management and quality assurance	9.3 Leadership of improvement and change
			6.4 Securing improvement through self-evaluation	
	3. Impact on staff		7. Recruitment, management and support of staff	
	3.1 Impact on staff		7.1 Recruitment	
			7.2 Staff training, development and support	
	4. Impact on the community		8. Commissioning of services?	
	4.1 Impact on the community		8.1 Commissioning arrangements	
Key question 10: What is our capacity for improvement? Global judgement based on an evaluation of the framework of quality indicators				

Appendix 2 - Self-evaluation webinar recordings

Please click on the links below to view recordings.

Webinar 1- Self-evaluation: How are we doing?

<https://youtu.be/BmXhsWsWTZ4>

Webinar 2 – Self-evaluation: How do we know?

<https://youtu.be/gdnwQPw9YFc>

Webinar 3 – Self-evaluation: What are we going to do now?

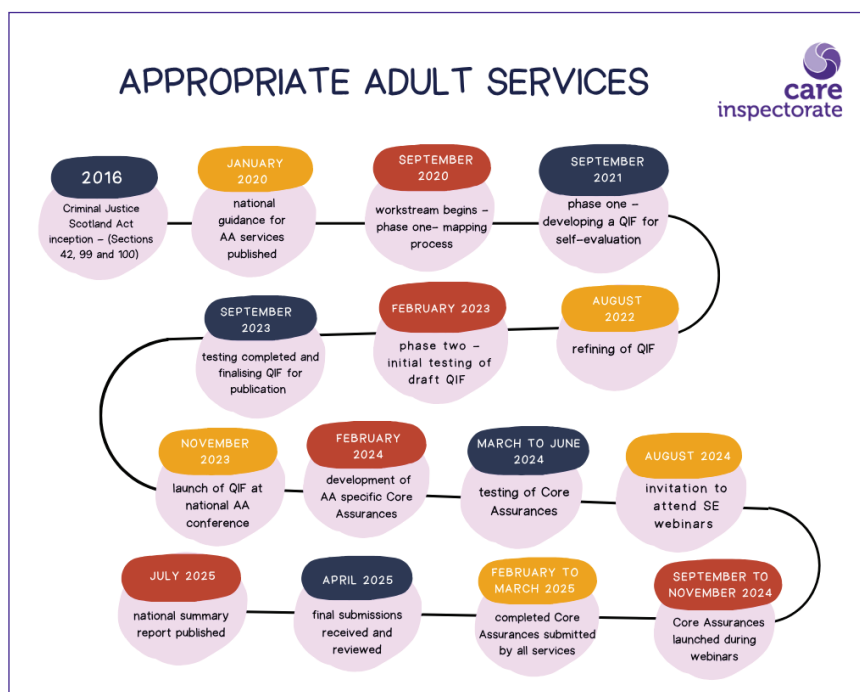
<https://youtu.be/ji4547gJTII>

Appendix 3 – Timeline

Below is a timeline and info-graphic of our key milestones (minus impact of the pandemic and several staff changes).

This includes:

- the inception of the Criminal Justice Scotland Act in 2016, specifically Sections 42, 99 and 100
- January 2020 – Scottish Government published national guidance for appropriate adult services
- September 2020 - we, the Care Inspectorate started the appropriate adult workstream by looking at the mapping process
- September 2021 - started development of a quality improvement framework (QIF) for self-evaluation
- August 2022 to December 2022 - QIF was refined
- February 2023 - initial testing of the draft QIF
- September 2023 - testing completed and finalised the QIF ready for publication
- November 2023 - QIF launched at the national appropriate adult conference
- -February 2024 - development of specific Core Assurances for appropriate adult services
- March 2024 to June 2024 testing of Core Assurances carried out
- August 2024 - all appropriate adult leads and co-ordinators invited to attend a series of self-evaluation webinars
- September 2024 to November 2024 - Core Assurances launched during webinars
- February 2025 to March 2025 - services submitted completed Core Assurances to us
- April 2025 - final submissions received and review of submissions started
- July 2025 - national summary report published.



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