Measuring Collaborative Capacity: A Framework for Practitioners

Briefing 3 of 4 from the series: Joining Up Services for Children in Glasgow — Public Service Reform, Integration and Productivity in Children's Services in Scotland

Authors:
Katherine Long
University of Glasgow
Bridgette Wessels
University of Glasgow
Des McNulty
Glasgow Caledonian University

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Authors' contacts:
Katherine.Long@glasgow.ac.uk

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The Productivity Institute is headquartered at Alliance Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester, Booth Street West, Manchester, M15 6PB. More information can be found on The Productivity Institute's website. Contact us at theproductivityinstitute@manchester.ac.uk

Purpose

This is the third of four briefings developed as a series from the Productivity Institute Project, "Joining Up Services for Children in Glasgow". The aim of the series is to define the relational approach to productivity and to apply it to the design and delivery of public services, focusing specifically on the process of joining up children's disability services in an area of Glasgow compounded by multiple intersecting disadvantages. Mapping out relevant contextual factors, literature and recent policy developments, the series assesses and analyses the cultural and political context in which productivity is to be measured and integrated services are to be delivered. Briefing 1 set out relational productivity as a conceptual framework and proposed, as a non-literal formulation, that Collaborative Capacity = Governance Capacity + Relational Capacity + Knowledge Capacity + Participation Capacity + Equity Capacity. This briefing takes that proposition and produces an outline for a practical measurement framework for Health and Social Care Partnerships, Children's Services Planning partnerships, and Community Planning Partnerships to assess whether local systems have the capacity to collaborate effectively.

Introduction

Scottish children's services are currently operating within a period of significant policy reform and there is growing recognition that many of the factors shaping children's lives cannot be understood through single-sector or narrowly defined measures of success. Alongside ongoing implementation of programmes such as *The Promise*, efforts to advance integration across health, social care and education, and the wider ambitions of Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy, there is increasing attention to the role that relationships, collaboration and preventative action play in improving outcomes for children and families. At the same time, evidence continues to highlight the uneven experiences of families navigating services, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting disadvantages, including poverty, disability and additional support needs. Both existing literature and recent Scottish Government funding and programme announcements point to the value of building local capacity to improve service coordination and achieve meaningful, lasting benefits for communities. Existing relationships, shared knowledge of local contexts and a common vision for children and families can provide the foundations for collaboration, fostering the trust, commitment and collective motivation needed for services to work effectively together. Against this backdrop, questions are emerging about how public systems can better identify, measure and support the relational and collaborative conditions that enable effective early intervention and long-term change. It is within this wider policy and practice context that a collaborative capacity and relational ecology framework should be designed.

The Review of Child Poverty Target Types

On 18 June 2026, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing, Shirley-Anne Somerville, confirmed to the Scottish Parliament the Scottish Government's intention to review the types of targets used to measure progress on child poverty. Many of the policies the government is investing in, the Cabinet Secretary noted, are not captured by income-based targets, which can skew debate toward social security spending even where other policies 'drive systemic change across our public services'. The review is intended to establish a more balanced approach spanning prevention, immediate support and longer-term outcomes.

The argument advanced across this briefing series speaks directly to that challenge. The relational ecology and collaborative capacity frameworks set out in Briefing 1 were developed to identify and measure the forms of systemic, preventative value that narrow income-based indicators can overlook. Rather than being viewed solely as an academic exercise, the framework offers a practical

contribution to debates about alternative measures of progress, providing a tested set of collaborative-capacity and relational-productivity indicators for children's services.

A Measure for Collaborative Capacity

The framework organises indicators around six domains, corresponding to the dimensions of the relational ecology set out in Briefing 1. Each domain can be scored 1–5 by a local partnership and aggregated into an overall Collaborative Capacity Index, allowing comparison over time within a single partnership rather than league-table comparison across areas, which poses risks of the same gaming and short-termism as currently existing output measures.

Domain	What it Assesses	Example Indicator
Governance Capacity	Whether formal structures actively support collective decision-making, not merely exist	Percentage of children's services priorities jointly owned by two or more agencies; number of local services included in local government integrated children's services action plans and scheduled activities
Relational Capacity	Trust and confidence in day-to-day interagency working	Percentage of practitioners reporting high trust in partner organisations
Knowledge Capacity	Shared data, evidence use and joint learning	Percentage of agencies able to access relevant shared information for care planning
Participation Capacity	The extent to which staff across services have the opportunity, time and support to participate meaningfully in collaborative activities	Percentage of service staff reporting that they have sufficient opportunities and organisational support to participate in collaborative activities with other services
Equity Capacity	The extent to which different sectors and partners have equitable opportunities to contribute to, influence and shape collaborative activity.	Percentage of third sector, education and health and social care partners reporting confidence that their knowledge, expertise and contributions are equitably valued and influential in collaborative activities supporting children and families
Outcome Capacity	The extent to which collaborative action is translating into more outcomes being met	Number of services that are collaborating reporting that outcomes are being met; Percentage of service staff reporting that services work together effectively around the child.

Measuring Relational Productivity Directly

Beyond the scorecard, four indicator groups allow a partnership to assess relational productivity more directly, drawing on the same six-dimension framework but focused specifically on the quality, rather than the mere presence, of relationships and processes.

- Relationship Quality — trust between agencies reported by staff; trust between practitioners and families reported by staff and families; continuity of professional relationships over time reported by staff.
- Coordination Quality — ease of navigating services as reported by families; ease of information-sharing between agencies as reported by staff; consistency of support across transitions as reported by families.
- Learning Quality — extent and/or impact of knowledge exchange across agencies reported by staff; evidence of joint training participation reported by staff; use of shared evidence in planning decisions as reported by staff.
- Equity Quality — extent to which staff across sectors report that their respective expertise and contributions are equitably valued and considered in the coordinated delivery of support to children and families, as reported by staff.

These indicator groups would be best gathered through a short annual practitioner and family survey rather than through additional administrative data collection, in order to avoid adding to reporting burden.

Applying the Framework to Neurodiversity and Learning Disabilities Needs

Briefing 2 identified disability as one of the clearest tests of whether Scotland's integration architecture functions as intended, as families of disabled children often become informal managers of complex care coordination when service coordination fails. Applying the scorecard to the community of learning disabilities and neurodiversity specifically illustrates how the framework should be used in practice.

Governance Capacity would be assessed by whether a local authority's Children's Services Plan makes explicit, resourced commitments to improving disabled children's support pathways via the involvement and integration of services that support them in action plans, rather than treating disability as a specialist add-on to a general plan. Relational Capacity would be assessed through practitioner-reported trust and perceived shared values and alignment of outcomes, specifically across education, health and social work staff supporting a disabled child, since this is where the literature reviewed identifies some of the greatest fragmentation. Equity Capacity would assess whether services across sectors supporting children with disabilities feel that their respective expertise and contributions are equitably recognised and influential in decisions about coordinated support. This reflects evidence that education, third and voluntary sector organisations can carry substantial responsibility for supporting children with disabilities, including through informal or uncoordinated provision, while the value of these contributions may be less visible where outcomes are not consistently traced or measured. Outcome Capacity would be measured by whether families and services report more often that outcomes originally intended to be achieved by the services were being met, which with other indicators may identify whether integration is supporting service delivery.

Aligning with, Not Adding to, Existing Reporting

Practitioners in Scottish children's services already report against several overlapping national frameworks: *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC)'s SHANARRI wellbeing indicators; the National Performance Framework; the Promise Progress Framework, which tracks progress against the promise's five foundations; and, since June 2025, the Public Service Reform Strategy's own Theory of Change and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, which is itself still under

development as of 2026 (Scottish Government, 2023; Scottish Government, n.d.; The Promise Scotland, COSLA and Scottish Government, 2024; Scottish Government, 2026). There is a risk that introducing a further, free-standing reporting framework alongside these would repeat fragmentation of practice. To reduce this risk, this framework should therefore be positioned explicitly as a lens for interpreting data that partnerships may already collect, and what may need to be collected and as a structured way of feeding relevant findings into two live, national-level processes: the Public Service Reform Strategy's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, which is still being designed and could incorporate collaborative capacity measures for children's services directly; and the child poverty target-types review discussed in Briefing 2, which raises the need to look for measures capable of capturing systemic, preventative value. Where a partnership already collects an indicator for one of these existing frameworks, this framework should re-use it rather than requiring a parallel collection exercise.

Conclusion and implications for the Joining Up Services Paper Series

Improving outcomes for children with disabilities requires attention not only to resources and service outputs, but also to the complex collaborative and relational conditions that enable effective support. By measuring collaborative capacity and relational productivity, Scottish children's services could better evidence preventative and systemic change that existing performance measures often overlook.

This framework is offered as a practical tool and not a final specification: partnerships adopting it should expect to adapt domain weightings and indicator choices to local circumstances, and should treat the Collaborative Capacity Index as a basis for local reflection and improvement planning rather than as a performance target in its own right, since converting it into a target risks reproducing the same gaming behaviour the framework is designed to move away from.

This briefing is written with one overriding constraint in view: practitioners in Scottish children's services already report against a substantial number of national frameworks. A new measurement framework is only worth adopting if it either replaces existing burden or adds something existing frameworks do not capture.

This measurement framework, together with the policy architecture reviewed in Briefing 2 and the conceptual case made in Briefing 1, translates into a list of recommendations that are adaptable within the current fiscal and political environment in the final briefing.

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