

SDS National Voice

2026

Learning and Leading



**Self Directed
Support Scotland**
the organisation of choice

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Welcome

Welcome to SDS National Voice 2026, Scotland's only national conference focused on Self-directed Support.

We're delighted to be in Glasgow at the Technology and Innovation Centre to welcome leaders from across Scotland. Today is a great chance to come together to learn, share ideas and make connections across the sector. Thank you for joining us and we hope you enjoy the day.

This year our theme is "Learning and Leading". Leadership in Scotland is focused more than ever on balancing social care pressures with effective solutions. The SDS National Voice conference, in its 8th year, is an opportunity for leaders to explore strategic solutions while upholdign people's human rights.

We're delighted to hear from the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing, Tom Arthur MSP, who will open proceedings with a keynote address.

Susan Douglas Scott CBE, Chair of the National Care Service: Interim Advisory Board will present on 'Learning and Leading', followed by a panel discussion with cross-sector leadership representation, sharing their insights on solutions.

For our in-person delegates, use your two workshop sessions to focus on your areas of interest on the issues experienced by leadership, and will allow for further discussion, learning, connections and inspiration.

In our plenary presentations of the day we'll hear from Joanna Macdonald about the National Social Work Agency, Heather Fiskien about the Independent Living Movement, and Arlene Johnstone about Leadership Values.

Programme

Join the conversation:

 /SDSScotland

 /self-directed-support-scotland

9.30am

Registration opens

Refreshments available in the main foyer

10.00

Main auditorium opens

Livestream opens

10.10

Welcome

Donald Macleod, Chief Executive Officer,
Self Directed Support Scotland

10.20

Keynote address

Tom Arthur MSP, Minister for Social Care
and Mental Wellbeing and Sport

10.35

Presentation: Learning and Leading

Susan Douglas-Scott CBE, Chair of the
National Care Service: Interim Advisory
Board

10.55

Panel discussion

- Susan Douglas-Scott CBE, Chair of the
National Care Service: Interim Advisory
Board
- Councillor Paul Kelly, COSLA Health and
Social Care Spokesperson
- Joanna Macdonald, National Chief
Social Work Adviser
- Ben Farrugia, Director, Social Work
Scotland
- Arlene Johnstone, Chief Officer, NHS
Highland
- Narek Bido, Chief Executive, Lothian
Centre for Inclusive Living

11.20

Presentation: National Social Work Agency

Joanna Macdonald, National Chief Social
Work Adviser

11.40

Break

Livestream closes

Refreshments available in the main foyer

12.00pm

Workshop one

1.00

Lunch

Available in main foyer

2.00

Workshop two

3.00

Break

Refreshments available in the main foyer

3.10

Main auditorium re-opens

Livestream re-opens

3.20

**Presentation: Independent Living
Movement**

Heather Fiskin, Chief Executive Officer,
Inclusion Scotland

3.40

**Presentation: Health and Social Care
Integration**

Arlene Johnstone, Chief Officer, NHS
Highland

4.00

Closing Speech

Becs Barker, Chair, Self Directed Support
Scotland

4.30pm

Event close

Livestream closes

Speakers and Panel



Donald Macleod

Chief Executive Officer, Self Directed Support Scotland

Donald has nearly 30 years' experience in social care, primarily leading learning disability focused third sector organisations. Prior to joining SDSS as Chief Executive in 2019, he worked with Autism Network Scotland, where he led the implementation of the Scottish Strategy for Autism, before establishing his own successful Autism consultancy. Donald has been involved in Self-directed Support implementation from its inception.



Tom Arthur MSP

Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing

Born in Paisley in 1985, he was first elected to the Scottish Parliament for the seat of Renfrewshire South at the 2016 election, holding the seat in 2021. He joined the Scottish Government as Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth in May 2021. Mr Arthur was raised in Barrhead, East Renfrewshire, where he was educated at Cross Arthurlie Primary and Barrhead High School. He graduated with a Bachelor of Music then later Master of Music from the University of Glasgow. Before entering politics, he worked as a company director, freelance piano teacher and keyboardist. He was appointed as for Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance in March 2023, and Minister for Employment and Investment in May 2024.



Susan Douglas-Scott CBE

Chair of the National Care Service: Interim Advisory Board

For the past 11 years, Susan has followed a diverse portfolio career as a freelance consultant in equalities, health, disability and social care; as a non-executive director and a charity trustee. She is also a humanist and spiritual care celebrant and chaplain with Celebrate People. This followed on from her 18-year career in local authorities and non-Government Organisations in the field of disability and health, including the CEO of PHACE Scotland, Epilepsy Scotland and the Health and Social Care Alliance.



Councillor Paul Kelly

COSLA Health and Social Care Spokesperson

Councillor Paul Kelly has been a Councillor for the Motherwell West ward of North Lanarkshire Council since 2007. From 2016-2022 he was Depute Leader of North Lanarkshire Council, a Non-executive director of NHS Lanarkshire, and Chair then Vice-Chair of North Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership Joint Integration Board. He has also previously been the Depute Leader of the North Lanarkshire Council Opposition Labour Group. He was appointed to the role of COSLA's Health and Social Care Spokesperson after his re-election as Councillor in 2022.



Joanna Macdonald

National Chief Social Work Adviser

Joanna brings over 30 years experience in the social work sector. Before her current appointment, she served as the Deputy Chief Social Work Adviser from 2021 to 2024, where she focused on children and families issues and contributed to the development of the National Social Work Agency. Joanna previously served as the Chief Officer of the Clackmannanshire and Sitrling Integration Joint Board, responsible for health and social care services in the region.



Ben Farrugia

Director, Social Work Scotland

As director of Social Work Scotland since October 2018, Ben leads a team which supports senior social work managers to inform and influence national policy and practice developments. Prior to his current role, Ben was part of the senior management team at CELCIS (Scotland's centre for excellence for children's care and protection) at the University of Strathclyde, and was responsible for the organisation's research, policy and consultancy offer. He has worked for the Scottish Government (looked after children team) and in Westminster (on children's services and regional economic development).



Arlene Johnstone
Chief Officer, NHS Highland

Arlene leads integrated adult health and social care services across one of Scotland's largest and most geographically diverse regions. She previously held several senior roles in NHS Highland, including Head of Mental Health, Learning Disability and Drug & Alcohol Recovery Services and Head of Learning Disability & Autism Services.



Narek Bido
Chief Executive, Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living

Narek is a dedicated third-sector leader with over 25 years of experience supporting individuals and communities impacted by poverty, addiction and mental health challenges. With a background in Business Management, he has also held a range of roles in L'Arche – an international federation of communities that provide inclusive living environments for disabled people. More recently, he was CEO for Recovery Scotland, a charity focused on supporting individuals on their recovery journey, from addiction to mental health issues.



Heather Fiskin
Chief Executive Officer, Inclusion Scotland

Following a stint in the Civil Service, she joined the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) on its first day. After the DRC closed, Heather led the Independent Living in Scotland project at the Equality and Human Rights Commission and then at Inclusion Scotland where she was then appointed as Head of Policy and Research before becoming CEO. Heather has also been on voluntary sector boards and was a member of Mobility Access Committee Scotland.



Becs Barker
Chair, Self Directed Support Scotland

Becs initially trained and worked as a nurse, before completing a degree with the Open University. A move to Scotland in 2004 led to managing and facilitating peer support with Neighbourhood Networks. It was here that Becs first learnt about Self-Directed Support. Since 2013 Becs has managed Argyll and Bute's independent SDS project, Carr Gomm's Community Contacts. She now leads on participation, involvement and innovation with Carr Gomm.

Workshops

Theme 1: Maximise Flexibility in Self-directed Support



A. Impact of Cuts to Direct Payments Research *Magali Redding, Research and Training Coordinator*

Through an interactive session, hear about preliminary findings on how Independent Support Organisations are being affected by cuts to Direct Payments. Research is now underway exploring the mechanisms through which changes in SDS packages occur and their impact on lived experience. The session will create space for discussion on how we can collectively respond to what the data tells us.



B. Leading in the Grey Areas *Pauline Boyce, Chief Executive Officer and Jenny Marshall, Head of Operations*

What do you do when the person you support makes a decision you wouldn't make yourself? This workshop explores one of the most challenging aspects of Self-directed Support leadership – navigating the space where individual autonomy meets professional responsibility. Through real-world composite case studies, we'll examine how practitioners and leaders can align practice with people's individual outcomes

Theme 2: Protect and Strengthen the Appropriate Use of Direct Payments



C. Self-directed Support Framework of Standards- Standard 13: Direct Payments to Employ Personal Assistants

Donna Murray, Self-directed Support Officer, Social Work Scotland, Danielle Farrel and Ann Marie Penman, Co-chairs of the Personal Assistant Programme Board Standard 13 Action Subgroup

Learn how supporting the implementation of Standard 13 protects and strengthens the use of direct payments. We will discuss the recommendations from Social Work Scotland's 'Impact of Cuts to Direct Payments' research, the priorities of the Standard 13 Action Group and local practices and experiences. We will share how collaborative working with a local authority peer space, the PA Programme Board and the National SDS Collaboration helps to influence leadership and protect Direct Payments: the vehicle for self-determination, independent living and valued citizenship.

Theme 3: Ensure a broad range of support is available at the point of need



D. Brokerage: A help or a hindrance in Self-directed Support?

Anne-Marie Monaghan, Community Brokerage Scotland Lead

This workshop will share the emerging findings from a PhD study that considers the role and function of community brokerage alongside care management. It will consider if community brokerage is of value to those who use it.

Theme 4: Build and nurture cross sector relationships



E. Disability Equality Plan

Tressa Burke, Chief Executive Officer, Marianne Scobie, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Karen Wylie, Policy and Participation Manager

The Disability Equality Plan was developed through a collaborative, cross-sector process, with three core-funded Disabled People's Organisations– Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance and Disability Equality Scotland, ensuring which ensured that lived experience shaped priorities from the outset. Learn how this collaborative approach brought together government, public bodies and the third sector through coordinated leadership, shared accountability and sustained co-design.



F. Self-directed Support Partnership Roadshows

Jane Kellock, Project Manager, Social Work Scotland, Julie Gerrard, Self-directed Support Lead Officer, South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Pauline Lunn, Director, In Control Scotland, and Pawel Kopec, Programme and Events Coordinator, Self Directed Support Scotland

This workshop will showcase how collaborative, community-rooted approaches are transforming Self-directed Support (SDS) practice across Scotland. Hear insights from the delivery of SDS Roadshows in several Local Authorities, as an example of what becomes possible when national partners, local leadership, and lived-experience voices work together. Participants will reflect on the opportunities available for local and national partners to work together to improve SDS implementation within their own local area.



G. Self-directed Support Improvement Plan

Donald Macleod, Chief Executive, Self Directed Support Scotland and Matt Crilly, Policy Manager, COSLA



As the current plan approaches its conclusion, participants will consider how to overcome barriers to efficient collaboration and effective implementation.

Theme 5: Improve data collection, research and shared intelligence



H. Artificial Intelligence and Social Care

Jeremy Adderley, Operations Manager, and Kaye Robertson, Operations Manager, Community Brokerage Network



Artificial intelligence is already be used to improve organisational capacity. Participants will explore case studies around the essential responsibilities that come with using AI in a social-care context: safeguarding people's rights, protecting sensitive information, ensuring accuracy in advice, and recognising the limits of automated tools.

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