

Introduction to COSLA and the Community Wellbeing Board

Policy Proposal

The purpose of this report is to support the role of the Community Wellbeing Board by providing an overview of what COSLA does, outlining its political and corporate structures, and highlighting the high level vision and principles adopted by the COSLA Convention within the COSLA Plan.

Summary and Recommendations

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note the overview of COSLA's approach, structures, principles and vision set out in the report and explained further at the meeting; and
- ii. Discuss the role of the Board in this context.

References

Previous reports:

- [COSLA Review Final Report](#) – Convention - March 2017
- [COSLA Plan 2017-2022](#) – Convention- June 2017

COSLA
September 2017

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Background

1. COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland. It provides political leadership and representation on national issues, and work with councils to improve local services and strengthen local democracy.
2. COSLA is councillor-led, and works on a cross-party basis on councils' behalf to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with governments and others on policy, funding and legislation.

Vision and Priorities

3. In March 2017 the COSLA Convention unanimously approved a Strategic Review of COSLA. Its 28 key recommendations covered governance, strategic focus, communications and relationships with professional associations and the wider local government family.
4. The review included agreement that COSLA should develop an overall strategic plan which would set out the high level vision and principles guiding the work of the organisation. Following extensive consultation with councils, councillors and across the local government family, the Plan was approved by Convention in June 2017.
5. The plan is set out at as agenda item 2a and is part of COSLA's revised performance management and planning arrangements. It includes 5 key principles governing all of COSLA's work and which have been incorporated into its Constitution, and 8 high level priorities which will be reviewed and updated annually. It is important to note that these are not intended to cover everything that COSLA does; each of COSLA's 4 Boards will maintain a Work Plan setting out the detailed areas of work that they will progress. An initial overview of this work plan is provided elsewhere on the Board's agenda.

Governance and Decision Making

6. The membership of the Environment and Economy Board is outlined at Annex A to this report. The Board operates within COSLA's broader political decision making structures, which have also been updated and modernised in line with recommendations made in the COSLA Review as follows:

| Element | Description |
|--------------------------------|---|
| COSLA Convention | STRATEGIC DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION Members reflect the political make-up of every member council and meet twice a year to set its priorities |
| COSLA Leaders' Meetings | KEY POLITICAL AND RESOURCE ISSUES Leaders meet eight times a year to focus on delivering COSLA priorities, and to debate and agree its approach |
| COSLA Policy Boards | POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY Decisions on specific services are the job of COSLA's four themed Boards, each chaired by a Spokesperson and including a representative from every member council. They meet 6 times a year. |

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| Special Interest Groups | SPECIFIC ISSUES AND POLICIES Special Interest Groups can be established specific policy work and focus on key issues in detail. |
| COSLA Leadership Sounding Board | DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENT The Leadership Sound Board comprises of COSLA's Presidential Team, Spokespersons and Political Group Leaders. It is a forum for identifying and discussing priority issues for local government while developing working relationships across the organisation. It also acts as COSLA's staffing committee. |

7. Each Policy Board's primary purpose is to progress the core work of COSLA through policy debate and exploration. In this regard, Boards have a critical role in supporting COSLA to understand councils' priorities in relation to a particular issue, and in using this to guide the policy development and decision making process.
8. A key challenge identified during the Review was also for Leaders meetings to focus on key priorities and in doing so empower Boards to actively manage other operational policy issues and decisions. Under COSLA's revised governance arrangements, it is therefore anticipated that Boards will be able to make decisions in relation to their thematic policy area. In doing so, the Board will also be responsible for referring issues which have significant political and budgetary implications for local government to the Leaders meeting. The new work plans for Boards and Leaders will provide a key focus for this work and will be updated on a rolling basis.

-Office Bearers

9. COSLA's office bearers were elected by the Convention in June 2017 and fulfil a formal representative role within COSLA. COSLA's Constitution requires that the President and Vice President must be of different political groups and different gender.

Presidential Team

- President: Cllr Alison Evison (Aberdeenshire, Labour)
- Vice President: Cllr Graham Houston (Stirling, SNP)

10. In addition, COSLA has five Spokespersons, each of whom has responsibility for a major policy area. Spokesperson posts are allocated on a cross-party basis, according to each political group's representation on the Convention, whilst ensuring that there is gender balance in the appointments that are made.
11. Each Spokesperson plays a pivotal role within COSLA. This includes acting as COSLA's primary point of contact with Government Ministers and others on relevant issues, developing relationships with partner organisations, engaging with the media, and enabling and supporting councils to contribute to the work of COSLA.
12. Four of COSLA's Spokespersons also chair a Policy Board. The Resources Spokesperson reports directly to Leaders due to the cross cutting nature of their work.

Spokespersons

- Community Well-being: Cllr Kelly Parry (Midlothian, SNP)
- Children & Young People: Cllr Stephen McCabe (Inverclyde, Labour)
- Health and Social Care: Cllr Peter Johnston (West Lothian, SNP)
- Environment and Economy: Cllr Steven Heddle (Orkney Islands, Independent)
- Resources: Cllr Gail MacGregor (Dumfries and Galloway, Conservative)

13. In addition, each political group represented within COSLA has appointed a Group Leader:

Political Group Leaders

- Labour: Cllr David Ross (Fife)
- SNP: Cllr Douglas Reid (East Ayrshire)
- Liberal Democrat: Cllr Peter Barrett (Perth & Kinross)
- Conservative: Cllr Jim Gifford (Aberdeenshire)
- Independent: Cllr James Stockan (Orkney Islands)
- Scottish Green Party: Cllr Steve Burgess (Edinburgh)

Corporate Structure

14. COSLA's organisational structure consists of a Senior Management Team (SMT) and 11 teams, plus a small corporate unit. The SMT consists of the Chief Executive, Sally Loudon; Corporate Director, Brenda Campbell; and Director for Integration and Development, James Fowlie.
15. COSLA's 8 themed policy teams represent the core of the organisation. Each team works on a range of policy areas and is led by a Chief Officer and contains a small number of Policy Managers and Policy Officers.

| Team | Remit / Main Policy Areas | |
|---|---|--|
| Children & Young People | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting it Right for Every Child policy development and implementation • Education, including education governance, Curriculum for Excellence, assessment and examinations, attainment and achievement, infrastructure, learning in early years' settings, post 16 education and additional support for learning • Integrated children's services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people's health • Improving outcomes for Looked After Children, and Corporate Parenting • Child protection • Children's hearings and youth justice • Child poverty • Aspects of employability for young people • Early Learning and Childcare Expansion |
| Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Empowerment & Engagement • Community and Criminal Justice • Community Safety and Resilience • Consumer Protection • Sports, Culture and Leisure • Employability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities and Human Rights • Housing & Homelessness • Migration and Refugee Issues • Poverty • Social Security & Welfare Reform |
| Environment and Economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconventional Onshore Oil and Gas Extraction • National Transport Strategy • Digital • Climate Change • Scotland's Economic Strategy (including the Enterprise and Skills Review) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Performance and Modernisation • Crown Estate • Islands Bill • Household Waste Charter • Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) |
| Health & Social Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of Health and Social Care • Reform of Adult Social Care • Charging Policies for Social Care • Public Health and Health Inequalities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older People's Care and Support/ NCHC and Care Home Provision • Supporting Carers • Social Care Workforce |
| Local Government Finance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal empowerment for local government • Spending Review • Capital and infrastructure investment • Taxation (including council tax, non-domestic rates and water) • Efficient Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting policy teams in respect of finance such • Settlement and distribution issues • Financial impact of welfare reform • Pensions |
| Local Government Employers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable and sustainable pay settlements • Progressive solutions to pay and reward • Working to ensure that councils' employment policies, pay and grading structures, and working practices deliver equality of opportunity • Positioning Scottish local government as an employer of choice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting modern and progressive workforce, including shared services • Helping councils respond effectively to structural, financial and demographic challenges • Supporting the Local Government and Teachers Pension Schemes |
| Image, Media & Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press & media management • Communications with member Councils | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinating COSLA's approach to influencing the Scottish, Westminster & Brussels Parliaments |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting a positive image of Local Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing and marketing the COSLA Conference Centre & events |
| Migration, Population and Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migration and Migrant Integration Dispersal of Asylum Seekers Equality and Human Rights Gypsy/Travellers Humanitarian Protection Schemes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Scots Refugee Integration No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Scotland's Demography Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Dispersal |
| Corporate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Democracy and Local Governance Brexit Cross cutting corporate policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COSLA Planning and Performance Internal improvement and transformation The COSLA Excellence Awards |

16. In addition, COSLA also operates three national shared services on behalf of all councils. These are the Business Gateway National Unit, myjobscotland and Trading Standards Scotland. There are separate governance boards for Business Gateway and Trading Standards Scotland but from time to time there may be items reported to the COSLA Environment and Economy and Community Wellbeing Boards.

Further Information and Updates

17. Finally, one of COSLA's greatest strengths is its ability to influence the country's key decision-makers. However, COSLA cannot succeed without the support of all of its members in ensuring that, together, local government speaks with a strong and collective voice.

18. Membership of a Policy Board therefore carries important responsibilities in terms of both representing individual council's views within COSLA, and in disseminating and implementing policy and other decisions that are made on a collective basis.

19. Building on feedback, COSLA is undertaking significant work to ensure that there is strong two way communications with all members to support this work, which will be subject to further ongoing reports.

20. Members may also wish to ensure that they access COSLA's main social media channels (Twitter @COSLA), and its website (www.cosla.gov.uk) to keep up to date with policy, press releases and political developments.

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