



...this is our story

2017-2022



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What is COSLA?

Established in 1975, COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland. We provide political leadership on national issues, and work with councils to improve local services and strengthen local democracy as a legitimate, respected sphere of government in Scotland.

Millions of people rely on the services that Local Government in Scotland delivers every day. Collectively, councils spend almost £19 billion a year on local services and employ over 240,000 people – nearly 10% of all employment in Scotland.

COSLA is our members

Our job is to stand up for Local Government and represent it effectively. We are a councillor-led, cross party organisation, representing all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. We work on behalf of our members to focus on their priorities, challenges and opportunities.

We fulfil our role by positively engaging with other spheres of government, key stakeholders and professional associations on policy, powers, funding and legislation. COSLA has a unique and strong position which puts us in the best position to influence and impact, championing councils' vital work, the essential services that they deliver and securing adequate resources and flexibility required to do what works for communities locally.

COSLA's work is vital to enable Local Government to address the outcomes in the [National Performance Framework](#) in partnership across Scotland for the benefit of individuals, communities and economies across Scotland.

As a champion for councils, we:

engage

ENGAGE in key financial, legislative and policy developments to ensure they have the best possible impact

lead

LEAD reforms that improve public services and save money effectively

develop

DEVELOP partnerships with Scottish, UK and international governments, parliaments, and the third and private sectors

negotiate

NEGOTIATE fair and affordable pay and workforce conditions on behalf of all councils

campaign

CAMPAIGN on the issues that matter to our members, and promote the image and reputation of Local Government

support

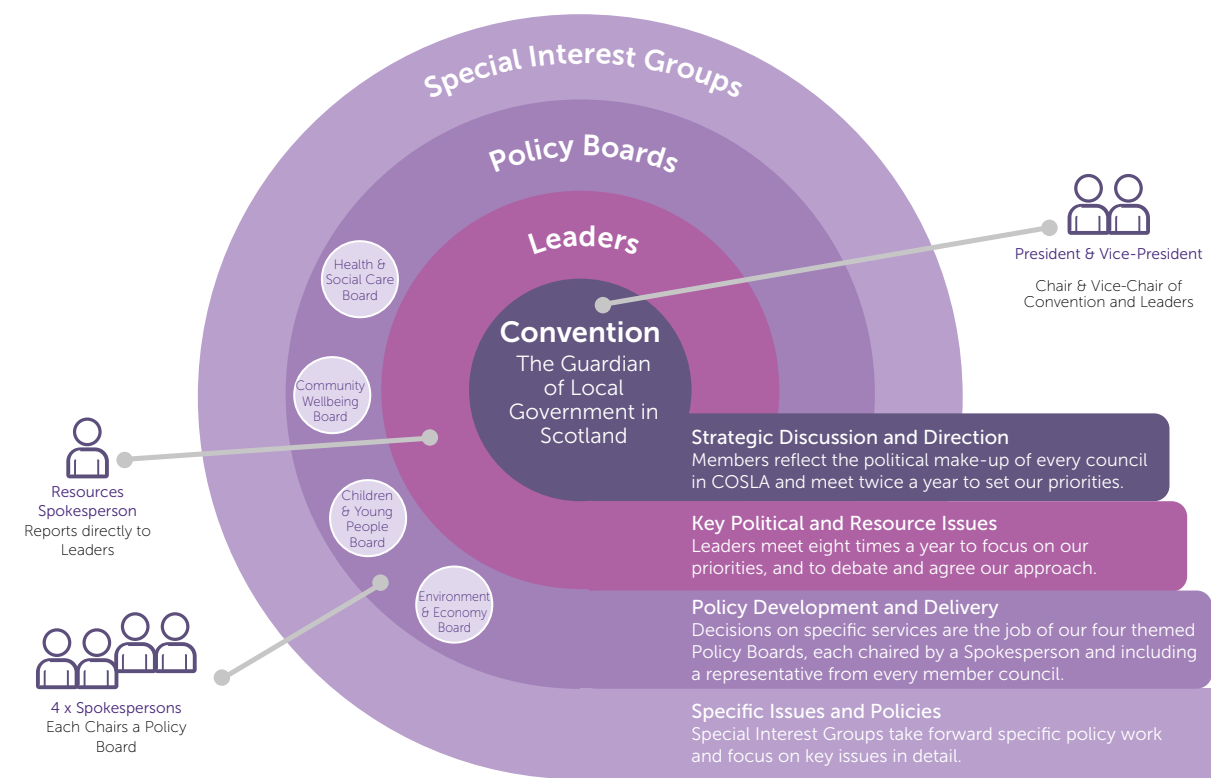
SUPPORT councils to work together, and deliver shared services that increase their capacity

champion

CHAMPION the role of Local Government in the governance of Scotland, and lobby for stronger local democracy and community empowerment

How we work

We are a politically led, cross-party organisation. That means that what we do, and how we do it, is decided democratically by elected Councillors from across our 32 member councils.



Our Political Leadership Team

COSLA is led by its President, Vice President, and five Spokespersons who represent COSLA across key policy areas. These office bearers were elected by the COSLA Convention. Appointments are cross-party and for 5 years. Last election saw us for the first time move to a gender balanced political leadership



President
Cllr Alison Evison
(Aberdeenshire, Labour)



Vice-President
Cllr Graham Houston
(Stirling, SNP)



Health & Social Care
Cllr Stuart Currie
(East Lothian, SNP)



Environment & Economy
Cllr Steven Heddle
(Orkney, Independent)



Community Wellbeing
Cllr Kelly Parry
(Midlothian, SNP)



Children & Young People
Cllr Stephen McCabe
(Inverclyde, Labour)



Resources
Cllr Gail Macgregor
(Dumfries & Galloway, Conservative)

Introduction from COSLA President



Councillor Alison Evison
COSLA President

Welcome to the COSLA Five-Year Report.

This is an exciting new first for COSLA - a document that captures our successes and achievements during the last five-year term of the Local Government election cycle 2017-2022.

Throughout this five-year term, Local Government has responded to the unexpected, adapted, embarked on new areas of work, developed partnerships, and always served our local communities.

Back in 2017, I was delighted to become COSLA's 15th President, only the third female President – and to be supported by a gender-balanced Political Team. From my personal perspective, as I reflect on the last five years, it is difficult to start anywhere else than the enormity of Local Government's initial and then continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic - and COSLA's crucial role in supporting that.

From assisting those in isolation and helping to establish vaccination centres, to ensuring the safe operation of schools and running local test sites, Local Government has been, and continues to be, on the frontline of the country's response.

The magnitude of such an effort has undoubtedly added a complexity to COSLA's already diverse workload. And yet, we have continued to make remarkable progress over a number of policy areas.

Going forward from the Pandemic in October last year, COSLA jointly committed to a [COVID Recovery Strategy](#) with Scottish Government to deal with the immediate impacts of the pandemic. The strategy will support and build on the partnership approach taken during the pandemic and focus on public services, jobs, financial security and the wellbeing of children and young people.

Throughout this five-year term, Local Government has responded to the unexpected, adapted, embarked on new areas of work, developed partnerships, and always served our local communities.

Against this ever-evolving backdrop, our focus on other matters has not faltered. From funding and the economy, to education and housing, we have worked to deliver what we know matters to local communities.

This report will illustrate just how crucial our councils' work is – and how hard we work to ensure that COSLA and Local Government is respected and listened to in Scotland, the UK and in Europe.

We saw a real opportunity to promote increased diversity amongst Scotland's Councillors, and COSLA's Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group (SIG) was established in 2018.

The Group has since developed guidance for Local Authorities on lone working and family leave for councillors and identified supports for women working through the menopause.

However, there is still more to be done and work has started on supporting a more diverse range of people, particularly women of colour, to consider standing as candidates in 2022, boosted by COSLA's 'Why You?' social media campaign.

Over the last five years, we have made a real and concerted effort to strengthen relations across the Local Government family and with the wider Public Sector, including the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, the Digital Office and Accounts Commission.

I am particularly proud of COSLA's work across the following areas:

- Development of a Third Sector Partnership Agreement
- Ongoing promotion of Local Government place within the National Performance Framework
- The Local Governance Review
- Period Products Bill
- European Charter on Local Self Government
- United Cities and Local Governments' World Council
- UK-EU Committee of the Regions Contact Group
- Implications of EU Exit on Councils

Over the last few years on behalf of our membership I have taken part in various summits involving fellow Presidents of national associations as well as a range of international virtual events in the run up to COP26.

COSLA's involvement with COP26 was a particular highlight. "Team COSLA" had a great presence in the Blue and Green zones during the conference, facilitating and developing connections and sharing of good practice that will contribute to work towards Net Zero worldwide. And I was absolutely delighted that our combined lobbying work was recognised. We should not underestimate our achievement in getting local and regional work mentioned in the final agreement – we are up for the responsibility and role that this gives us.

Importantly, the role of Local Government was recognised at COP26.

Brexit has been at the forefront of our work over the last few years. As President I have:

- had regular meetings with successive Cabinet Secretaries for Constitution and External Affairs on issues such as the EU Continuity Bill, where COSLA obtained the right of Local Government to be consulted by Ministers;
- taken the Local Government position to UK Ministers via the EU Exit Ministerial Local Government Delivery Board, so that there has been greater awareness of the impact on our local councils and on regulatory and other services.

When I was appointed COSLA President in June 2017 – I said that it was one of the top political jobs in Scotland and I stand by this claim.

And having done the job for 5 years, I would re-affirm the significance of this highly varied role to which I have been honoured to have been elected.

Introduction from COSLA Vice-President



Councillor Graham Houston
COSLA Vice-President

During COVID, I led the development of a [Blueprint for Local Government](#).

COSLA launched the Blueprint in September 2020, following a substantive period of engagement across Local Government. We also engaged with a range of external partners during the development process including, but not restricted to, organisations such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), Young Scot, Community Justice Scotland, as well as representatives in academia. This ensured that the Blueprint was inclusive and collaborative.

The Blueprint sets out an ambitious vision for Scotland's future – one based on the empowerment of people and communities. It outlines the central role that Local Government can, and should, hold in leading recovery and renewal that empowers communities across Scotland, as well as setting out the support we need to deliver upon this vision.

The Blueprint is framed around six key themes:

- **Strengthening Local Democracy**
- **Funding Services and Communities**
- **Wellbeing – including Health and Social Care**
- **Education and Children and Young People**
- **Economy and the Environment**
- **Supporting Vulnerable Communities**

As COSLA's Vice President, I support the President as well as lead on Parliamentary engagement and key work including Open Government and the annual [Local Government Benchmarking Framework](#).

Case studies are included throughout the Blueprint document and we have continued to build this valuable evidence base from the many examples of best practice that we engage with from a COSLA perspective on a daily basis. This is a vitally important aspect of COSLA's role, the ability to bring together and demonstrate the positive examples of change from across the entirety of Local Government.

For example, to mark the 10th anniversary of the Christie Commission we collated a large number of [examples](#) from across Councils showcasing positive examples of the Christie recommendations in action at a local level.

More than a year after it was released, it is clear to me that the Blueprint remains as relevant as it was when it was first published. Moving forward we will have many opportunities to build upon the positive response and engagement that has accompanied the document to date, using the platform that COSLA provides to ensure that its vision is one which is clearly reflected in policy development and political discourse. The Blueprint for Local Government is a clear example of the leadership role that Local Government collectively holds, and the important role of COSLA in pulling this together and advocating on behalf of Councils, and that is why it continues to be a central component of our work.



Cross-cutting Corporate Work

The past five years has seen a renewed effort to bring cohesion, coordination, and focus to the wide range of inward and outward facing corporate work carried out by COSLA. This has included work on the following areas.

- Brexit/EU Transition
- European Charter for Local Self-Government
- Local Governance Review
- Local Government Benchmarking Framework
- Public Sector Reform
- Open Government
- Electoral Reform
- Best Value Guidance Review
- National Performance Framework and Outcomes
- Councillors' Code of Conduct
- COSLA Priorities
- COSLA's Transformation Plan, now succeeded by a Development Plan
- COSLA Constitution
- COSLA Performance Monitoring

EU Exit

With an impact analysis survey in 2017 followed up in 2018, together with a number of more focussed information gathering exercises, from the beginning COSLA sought to assess the impacts EU Exit was likely to have on councils. Significant resource was applied to liaising with our member councils, understanding their concerns and coordinating our messages and mitigations in response to this. Among the issues arising were Environmental Health Officers capacity for certification, funding for local Brexit coordinators, Brexit seminars, coordination with Scottish Government, liaison with the other UK Local Government Associations and UK Government. The work included two Brexit Conferences and continues post EU Exit with work which includes ongoing monitoring of the impacts on councils as they are now emerging but now coupled with other pressures; with the findings recently presented at a meeting with the UK Minister for Scotland.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a dominant aspect of COSLA's work over the past two years. COSLA has worked closely with key partners throughout the response to COVID-19, providing support for councils as they worked and served their local communities.

This work included, but has not been limited to the following:

- Ensuring that councils are able to influence and support the national programmes to mitigate the impact of COVID19 in their area, including test and trace, community testing, vaccinations and compliance
- Representing Local Government interests in national working groups looking at issues such as vaccination, testing, and compliance
- Providing national support to local teams who are redesigning the delivery of their services
- Ensuring that there is adequate financial provision for the many additional services being delivered by local government to our communities.

Our member councils were keen to secure a moving picture of the emerging pressure points on their services so that prompt action could be taken to mitigate any challenges. COSLA worked on developing the Local Government Data Dashboard in partnership with SOLACE and the Improvement Service. Drawing on data already required by the Scottish Government and other public agencies, the work quickly resulted in a weekly updated dashboard of key data which continues to provide an overview to council chief executives.

COSLA is also working the Scottish Government and partners to progress a joint programme for COVID-19 recovery. This covers key priority areas including public services recovery, redesign and renewal; good green jobs and fair work; financial security for low-income households and wellbeing of children and young people. This joint oversight of recovery priorities is a result of continuous engagement regarding the central role that Local Government holds in supporting the recovery process and addressing the inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

European Charter on Local Self-Government

Work on securing legislation to unpin Local Government in Scotland has been ongoing since before and throughout the past five years. COSLA has supported all the work carried out to achieve this ambition and has liaised with and supported the work done through the consultation stages and committee stages as the recent Members' Bill successfully passed through the Scottish Parliament. As is well known, the Bill did not receive royal assent due to the recent ruling by the UK Supreme Court. So work will continue with Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to ensure all the work done to date is not lost and that a revised Bill is passed and achieves our long-held ambition.



Communications

The last five years has seen a determined and strategic approach to the transformation of COSLA's communications, responding to a request from our membership to make Local Government's voice heard, in a positive, proactive and varied way.

Key Achievements



we have relaunched the **COSLA website**, to make it more interactive and aligned with the Improvement Service



Use of our **social media** channels has been broadened over the term of this COSLA, with a much more interactive style in line. This has been hugely successful, resulting in 15,000 additional Twitter followers since 2017. (17,300 today)



Since the start of the COVID pandemic in March 2020, we have increased the use of **short videos** to boost the visibility of the Presidential Team and our Spokespeople.



We have redesigned our **social media graphics** and improved accessibility of our content, introducing video subtitles.



Our expanded communications work has seen a move into the world of **podcasts** for the first time with a 'COSLA in Conversation' – on the European Charter of Local Self Government Bill.



The Communications Team continues to engage with a strong professional network of **media teams** across all Councils in Scotland, as well as maintaining positive relationships with the country's print and broadcast media.



We have produced detailed **briefings** on a range of subjects, from the proposed National Care Service to the Local Governance Review, and from Brexit to our work representing Local Government in Europe, useful for our Elected Members and Parliamentarians.

All of this is complementary to our media relations, which have been bolstered by campaign content and social media activity.

Campaigns



Why You? - aimed at encouraging a wider range of people to consider standing in the forthcoming Local Government elections next May. This particular campaign also highlighted the work of our Barriers to Elected Office SIG (Special Interest Group).



Budget Lobbying - this remains our biggest and most important piece of campaign/ lobbying work which we undertake on an annual basis and which has been the genesis in terms of style for a number of our other more recent campaigns



Fact Friday showcases the vast range of service provided by Councils – with a deliberate focus on some of the less obvious services, using a "did you know..." approach



COP26 - with weekly videos from our Spokespeople, and graphics highlighting the work of Councils in tackling climate change



#WeAreLocalGovernment - a Campaign showing the work of Scottish Local Government which had its genesis in the Social Renewal Advisory Board report and the COSLA Blueprint. Primarily a campaign of short videos – aimed at a younger audience, it saw COSLA's first ever use of Instagram.

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 brought challenges – in response, COSLA's communications work was revised and restructured almost overnight. But it also offered us the opportunity to highlight the essential services Scotland's Councils provide every day.

- A Day in the Life of Scotland's Councils' video shone a light on the heroic response of Local Government and was met with great acclaim.
- 'Don't Stay on Mute' focused on the impact of the pandemic on mental health and was released in partnership with our Trades Union colleagues.
- The videos were bolstered by two similarly well-received social media campaigns - #CouncilsCare and then #CouncilsAct – which focused on the work Councils were doing to support their communities during the initial stages of the pandemic.

Back in March 2020, our monthly digital 'Inside COSLA' publication was replaced with a weekly **Elected Members Briefing**, offering current key messages and strategic updates for every Councillor in Scotland. This is now firmly established as an important tool for communicating with Elected Members

Our positive and proactive approach has been well received by the COSLA membership, as well as the media, providing a strong foundation for the future.





Local Government Resources: Funding

To ensure Councils have the funding they need to deliver high quality services and improve outcome for communities, COSLA's Resources Spokesperson is supported by the Local Government Finance Team. Working as a 'business partner' across COSLA, the team gets involved where money for new policies is being discussed with Scottish Government. And our Spokesperson leads high level funding negotiations on behalf of COSLA.

Key Achievements

Fair Funding for Essential Services

2017 saw the introduction of COSLA's "Fair Funding for Essential Services" message to lobby Scottish Government for a fair settlement for Councils. Our campaigns have developed over the last 5 years and gained significant press coverage and traction across Scottish Parliament, leading to questions and motions about the Local Government Settlement in the Parliament's Chamber. The campaigns, supported by the work of our Resources Spokesperson with all opposition party finance leads, helped secure additional funding of over **£600m** for Councils over the last 5 years as Budget Bills have passed through Parliament.

Budget Scrutiny

Our campaigns have strong foundations in pre-budget scrutiny submissions to all relevant Scottish Parliament Committees, including the Finance and Local Government committees. Over the last 3 years, our submissions and appearance at Committees have been done jointly with SOLACE and Directors of Finance, presenting a united 'Team Local Government' voice about the need for fair funding.

Funding Distribution

Through the Settlement and Distribution Group (SDG), the team works with Scottish Government to ensure that funding is distributed in a fair, needs-based way to all Councils- this results in recommendations being made to COSLA Leaders on how each councils' share should be calculated.



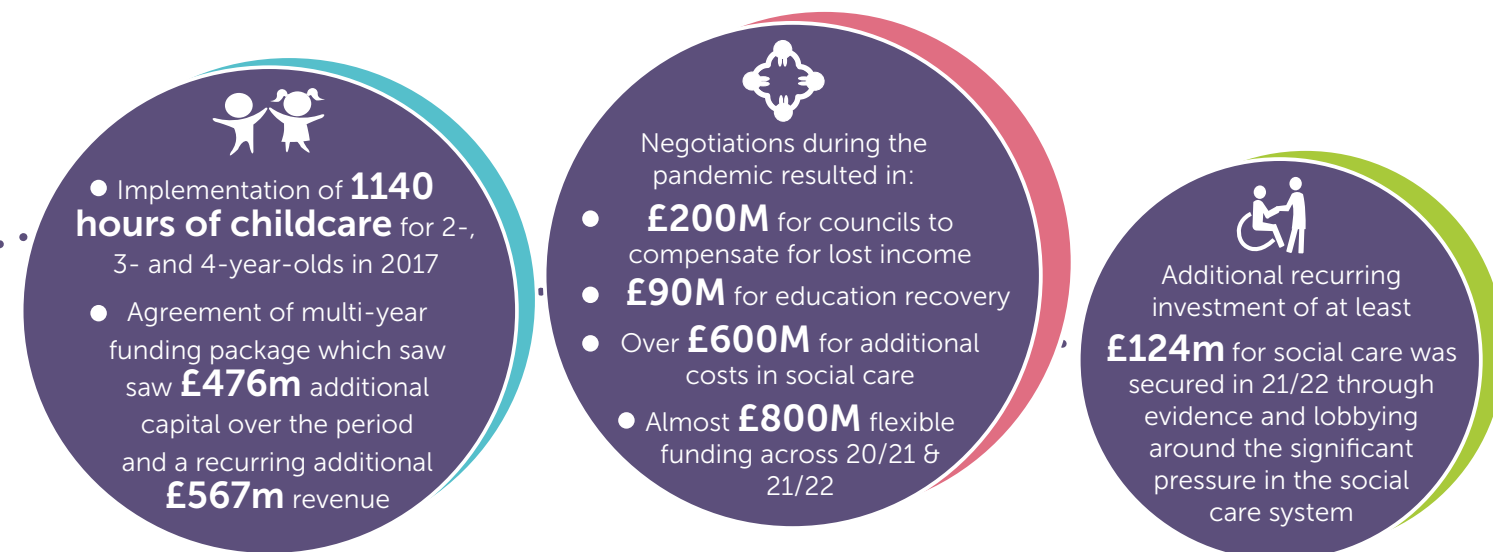
Structure of the Local Government Settlement

It's not all about the money – it's about the structure of the Local Government Settlement and how councils are able to use and raise their funding. Our campaigns have highlighted key asks around:

- **Maximum flexibility**, with as little ring-fencing as possible.
- **No cap on council tax** – finally agreed by Scottish Government for 22/23.
- **Local taxation and revenue raising powers** - successes have included the introduction of Workplace Parking Levy legislation and a commitment from Scottish Government to look at a Transient Visitor Levy ('Tourism Tax').

Funding Stability

Ultimately, Local Government wants stability and certainty around its funding and before the pandemic, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance wrote to Cllr Macgregor to say we would take a forward a 'Fiscal Framework' (i.e. rules and principles of our funding relationship) at pace, bring forward plans in time for next parliamentary session, and that joint work on devolution of Non-domestic Rates would be part of this work – with a refreshed mandate from Leaders secured in September 2021 (post pandemic), we are now ready to progress constructive discussions with Scottish Government.



Featured Work

Financial Redress for Victims of Historical Child Sexual Abuse

Local Government was keen to support the principles of new legislation but was conscious of the unknown costs. Through strong partnership working with Scottish Government we reached agreement on a total collective contribution from Local Government of £100m over the next 10 years and a commitment from Scottish Government for 6 monthly reporting.

Looking Forward

COSLA has also been working to embed equality and human rights principles into budgeting. We are active members of the Equality Budgetary Advisory Group which produces the Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement that accompanies each Scottish Budget. With Leaders agreement, actions from the National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership will see significant legislation introduced in this parliamentary term to support budgeting based on rights realisation - with the pandemic exacerbating inequalities, this will be particularly important going forward.



Local Government Resources: Workforce

COSLA plays an essential role in ensuring that Councils are supported to have a skilled and well-developed workforce that have sector-leading terms and conditions. COSLA's work supports Scottish Local Government to attract and retain individuals who can deliver the highest quality essential services to all members of our community. To facilitate this, the Employers Team works both as a "business partner" across COSLA (involved in discussions where the role of the workforce is impacted by government policies) and supports COSLA's Resources Spokesperson with national bargaining to ensure positive employee relations are maintained with our Trade Unions.

Key Achievements

Pay Deals

Over the last 5 years COSLA has supported the Resources Spokesperson to deliver a series of pay deals, reflective of the need to value our workforce, but under extremely challenging financial circumstances. Significantly, the 3 year deal in 2018 provided security and certainty for both councils and employees. Delivering a pay deal during the COVID pandemic has also been a significant achievement, against a backdrop of government interventions that undermined COSLA's "one workforce" position. Our focus remains on achieving parity across the workforce, and multi-year settlements that enable better strategic planning to support the longer-term preventative approach that Local Government is best placed to deliver.

Fair Work Across Councils

COSLA's role in maintaining effective and positive employee relations has led to a continued drive to embed Fair Work across Councils -during the pandemic our work to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees was paramount. Producing guidance, circulars and campaigns such as "Don't Stay on Mute" (focused on mental health) have given a clear message to our workforce of their value, the importance of their daily roles, but of the need to promote health and wellbeing.



COSLA's key work includes:



Looking Forward

As we look ahead, ensuring that COSLA continues to support effective workforce planning across the Local Government family and the shift to new hybrid ways of working are a key focus. This will be particularly important as we work with Councils to consider the impact of the National Care Service on local services. Our work will continue to promote the value that the Local Government workforce adds to communities across Scotland, and the positive economic and social impact that good, fair employment can bring.



Children and Young People

The work of the Children and Young People Board and policy team has been underpinned by an ambition to put children at the centre of our approach, by delivering positive outcomes based on the principles of GIRFEC and ensuring local accountability for all Children’s Services including Education and Early Learning and Childcare.

Key Achievements

Child Poverty

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 created a new duty which reinforced the leading role that councils play in tackling child poverty. Councils continue to support people into employment, tackle the cost of the school day through expanding access to free school meals and increasing the school uniform grant, as well as providing cash payments to low-income families as ‘bridging payments’ until the Scottish Child Payment is available to all families. COSLA continues to work with partners on the next phase of their Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Education Reform

COSLA has consistently highlighted the benefits of local accountability for education, allowing services to be shaped to Scotland’s diverse communities. This was key during the debate on Education Governance, resulting in the joint agreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government on Education Reform and the establishment of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). COSLA has worked to support the school empowerment agenda, making sure all partners – learners, parent/carers, school leaders and school staff – have the opportunity, autonomy and support to work together to improve children and young people’s outcomes.

The Care Review and The Promise

COSLA was closely involved in the work of the Independent Care Review which learned from the experiences of those living and working in and around the ‘care system’. Local Government has been committed to this work and to “Keeping the Promise” that Scotland’s children will grow up ‘loved, safe and respected’.


Additional Support for Learning

COSLA has worked with partners to develop resources to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding of teachers through the development of resources for school staff to support children and young people with Dyslexia and Autism. COSLA welcomed the recommendations made in the Morgan Review of the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning legislation and work is ongoing to implement these.

Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing

The COSLA Children and Young People’s Board has continuously committed to supporting children and young people’s mental health. Mental health remains a priority and COSLA continues to support mental health and wellbeing, co-chairing the Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board.




88,122 children accessing more than 600 funded ELC hours and **79,262** children taking the full 1140 hours.
An **83%** increase in the ELC workforce between 2016-2021
Over **700** capital ELC projects complete


Almost **1000** children and young people benefitted from an improved approach to forensic interviewing in the first year of the Scottish Child Interview Model going live in six local authorities


Year on year increase in the number of school leavers achieving vocational qualifications at SCQF level 5 and above, almost doubling from 7.5% in 2013/14 to **14.8%** in 2017/18

Featured Work

Access to Free Period Products

Local Government led in the provision of access to free period products in primary and secondary schools from August 2018. In December 2018 this initiative was extended, with councils also committing to provide free products in public buildings. The primary aim was to provide access to products to address period poverty, but gender equality and emergency provision were also taken into consideration. COSLA worked closely with partners to influence the parliamentary process to help ensure the Act retained appropriate local flexibility, and that provision remains fully funded.

Counselling Through Schools

COSLA worked closely with Scottish Government to develop a set of high-level principles to allow for locally flexible provision of counselling accessed through schools. COSLA highlighted the importance of individualised approaches, in line with GIRFEC, with counselling seen as one option as part of a range of holistic supports. In the first half of 2021 alone, over 10,000 children and young people have accessed counselling services and the overall picture on improving outcomes for young people is positive.

Looking Forward

Children and young people must be at the heart of recovery –through investment in the systems, services, and people who support them, as well as through sustained focus on ensuring children and young people’s voices are heard, valued, and respected at every step of policy development and delivery. Although it will be challenging, there is significant and important work underway that provides Local Government with a clear opportunity to lead the way in improving outcomes for children and young people through implementation of The Promise, a commitment to incorporate UNCRC and to children’s rights more broadly at the local level, and significant resource to tackle the attainment gap and improve digital inclusion. The work of the Board will continue to ensure that the needs and ambitions of local communities, families, and children and young people are promoted.



Community Wellbeing

The work of the Community Wellbeing Board and policy teams falls under 3 main broad policy areas: Communities; Migration, Population and Diversity; and Trading Standards Scotland. The next pages outline the key work and achievement from these 3 policy areas.

Communities

The Communities' work is broad and supports the Board in tackling poverty and inequalities, protecting the vulnerable, strengthening communities and improving their safety and sustainability.

Key Achievements

Housing

COSLA has made progress in equalising the subsidy levels to build new housing. The difference in the benchmarks applied across social housing providers was narrowed in 2021. The effects will be kept under review with COSLA's aim being for the support to eventually be the same. We continue to make the case for the rising costs in this area to be met so that the new build targets can be achieved and for homelessness to decrease. The pandemic saw considerable joint Scottish and Local Government work on homelessness. COSLA supported the push for a homelessness prevention duty so Local Authorities can work more actively with their partners. While our hopes for short term lets licensing powers were not fully met, legislation to regulate them has been passed.

Welfare and Social Security

Our close work with the UK and Scottish Government has supported councils' delivery of 'reserved' and 'devolved' welfare and social security. COSLA helped establish Social Security Scotland, and the design and implementation of the new devolved benefits. We've brought together Local Authorities and DWP on matters linked to Universal Credit. Using our local arrangements COSLA's members have mitigated some impacts of welfare reform. We've removed all local authority child funeral charges, ensuring consistency in an approach that promoted greater transparency and fairness while addressing funeral poverty. The pandemic saw Local and Scottish Government design and deliver support to those worst affected including: Self isolation Support Grants; Winter Pressures; Flexible Funding and Scottish Child Payments. Now, and for the next period, our partnership with the Scottish Government will deliver the disability benefits here. Our Welfare Advisory

group informs our broader poverty work including the ongoing Review of Scottish Welfare Fund.

Policing and Community Safety

COSLA's Police Scrutiny Conveners and staff have met regularly with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. We have resolved issues such as counter closures, traffic restriction orders, and improved councils' engagement in local police plans. Work is still underway on CCTV. Our spokesperson meets regularly with the Justice Cabinet Secretary including on Serious and Organised Crime and is working on scrutiny arrangements with the SPA.

Employability

With the Scottish Government, our partners and advisers our work has transformed employability services. "No One Left Behind" sharply focuses on the most disadvantaged in the labour market who need the greatest support. It will bring national coherence and local discretion, promoting person-centred, place-based approaches. Early 2022 will see a refreshed, strategic partnership with the Scottish Government and a formal partnership with DWP to promote common purposes and support local relationships. Local Employability Partnerships have been strengthened to provide better joined-up service planning and a mixed economy of delivery. National frameworks and charters have been agreed setting expectations and standards while promoting consistency. There's been a rapid enhancement and development of local and national commissioning frameworks. COSLA has supported an exponential increase in investment in local employability services, at about £80m for 2021/22, channelled through LAs. This is enabling a strong contribution to economic recovery and social renewal, supporting the national mission to tackle child poverty.

Participatory Budgeting

Strengthening local democracy is fundamental to community wellbeing and empowerment. In 2017 councils agreed to allocate at least 1% of their budgets using PB. COSLA has supported members' work through training, support of the PB Officers Network and the CONSUL digital platform. The pandemic delays saw COSLA leaders updating the agreement to reflect challenges faced by councils.

Appropriate Adults

This area of human rights activity for those in the justice system continues to be a matter of strategic and corporate importance to Local Authorities. COSLA is working with the Government and members of the National Oversight Group on the

'new' statutory arrangements. Local oversight and governance arrangements need to be fully developed.

Justice

During the pandemic COSLA worked with the Scottish Government and partners to safely land the early release of prisoners and the Recovery of the Justice System Programme. We continue to argue for the full funding of our work to maximise community justice options over expensive prison sentencing. October 2020 saw COSLA and the Scottish Government have joint political oversight of the Recover, Renew Transform Programme's Community Justice Group.



Increase of around **£80M** in investment in local employability services for 2021/22, supported by COSLA



Data for 2020/21 shows that **£78m** of local government money was allocated through participatory processes with local communities

Featured Work

Equally Safe / Violence Against Women and Girls

Since 2016 Scottish and Local Government have driven a joint whole system approach through the Equally Safe Strategy, its delivery plan and the funding associated with it. The cultural changes needed have been progressed through our collaborative leadership. Our three years of 16 days campaigning has increased awareness of councils' commitment to tackling VAWG. With the multi-agency VAW partnerships and national specialist organisations we have highlighted the local delivery of Equally Safe and promoted the White Ribbon campaign to encourage personal and collective action among men. We identified the importance of responding to the gendered impacts of the pandemic which saw an intensification of gender-based violence and provided additional support and guidance. The need to tackle deep rooted and negative gender expectations, attitudes and behaviours was highlighted in COSLA's Blueprint which underpins our priorities for recovery & renewal.

Looking Forward

The near future holds much uncertainty for and challenges to the 'wellbeing work' of councils. As costs and other pressures on individuals, families and communities build up their voices and those of the people who represent them need to be heard, respected and responded to. Many of the services, being largely discretionary, are under particular threat from reducing council budgets. Additionally, the creation of the National Care Service is likely to have a considerable impact on portfolios managed by the Board including community justice, homelessness, appropriate adults and violence against women and girls. The Board will continue to make the case for investment in these key services and for joint approaches across governments where competencies are shared.



Migration, Population and Diversity

The Migration, Population and Diversity team has responsibility for a range of policy issues relating to migration, population, demographic change, equality and human rights. The team also provides operational support to councils in their work with migrants, including refugees and people seeking asylum.

Key Achievements

Ending Migrant Destitution

In 2021, COSLA and Scottish Government published Ending Destitution Together, a national strategy to prevent destitution for migrants with no recourse to public funds. During the pandemic we also supported local authorities to use their public health powers to provide emergency accommodation to some of the most vulnerable people who were at risk of rough sleeping. We are now seeking to ensure that COVID recovery planning includes people who are unable to access key benefits and services because of their immigration status.

EU Citizens

COSLA has focused on ensuring EU citizens living in Scotland continue to feel welcome and can access their legal status to remain here after EU exit. We have delivered regional events for EU citizens, and our partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has supported many of our most vulnerable EU citizens to make applications to the EU Settlement Scheme. This partnership has now expanded to support other migrants, including people with no recourse to public funds.

Population

COSLA was closely involved in the development of Scotland's population strategy 'A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's

changing population', published in March 2021 further to endorsement by Council Leaders. COSLA is now working with Scottish Government to support the delivery of the strategy and to ensure that the voice of all 32 councils is reflected in the approach that is taken.

Gypsy/Travellers

COSLA is supporting the delivery of a joint National Action Plan with Scottish Government on 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers'. This has included a £2million short term capital fund to improve living conditions on local authority Gypsy/Traveller sites, and the selection of demonstration projects as part of a five year £20m Accommodation Fund to create more and better accommodation across Scotland. COSLA also supported a Negotiated Stopping pilot for managing roadside encampments, while all 32 Council Leaders agreed principles set out in a joint COVID-19 framework with Scottish Government to support a public health-based approach to providing services.

Migrants from Hong Kong

COSLA receives funding from UK Government to facilitate the integration and welcome of British National (Overseas) visa holders moving from Hong Kong to Scotland. Our recently launched Hong Kong Welcome Hub provides a bespoke, innovative, and bilingual online resource for arriving Hongkongers and for council officers and third sector organisations supporting their integration.



Over **3500** refugees resettled across all 32 councils since 2015

An additional **400** people from Afghanistan resettled since June 2021



Close to **1,000** LA officers and **64** elected members representing all 32 councils have attended COSLA/IOM awareness raising sessions on the EU Settlement Scheme



Partnership with IOM has enabled us to provide casework support for **over 450** applications to the EU Settlement Scheme from vulnerable migrants.

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

Featured Work

Refugee Resettlement

COSLA continues to play a central role in assisting all 32 councils to deliver on their commitment to support people fleeing their countries due to war and persecution. Scottish councils played a central role in resettling refugees through both the Syrian Resettlement Programme and Vulnerable Children's Relocation Scheme, and continues to do so through the UK Resettlement Scheme and the new Afghan resettlement schemes. COSLA facilitates joint working with the Home Office and provides opportunities for peer support and interaction with key partners including the UK Government, Scottish Government and the third sector. COSLA also supports councils' commitment to participate in the National Transfer Scheme Rota for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Barriers to Elected Office (BEO)

A key priority for COSLA has been to increase councillor diversity by tackling barriers to elected office for underrepresented groups. Our work in this area has been directed by a cross-party Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group, established in 2018. Through this group, COSLA has developed guidance on lone working, family leave and the menopause to help local authorities support their elected members and has worked with the other UK local government associations to develop resources to address the online abuse and harassment of councillors. Recent work has also focused on councillor remuneration and we are working with the Scottish Government to explore options to review councillor pay.

Looking Forward

COSLA will continue to assist councils in their vital work to support some of our most vulnerable communities, including those being resettled in Scotland through the UK's humanitarian protection schemes and migrants facing destitution. We will develop new guidance for local authorities on the rights of EEA nationals living in Scotland and will create a suite of resources to improve local authorities' understanding of the immigration rules and what they mean for the provision of public services. We will work closely with councils, and with our partners in IOM to offer integration support and advice and will create resources to expand the reach and value of our Hong Kong Welcome Hub. Building on work before the pandemic, a virtual Local Leaders network for politicians, public service providers and Gypsy/Travellers will also be established to tackle racism and discrimination and remove barriers to public service for Gypsy/Traveller communities.

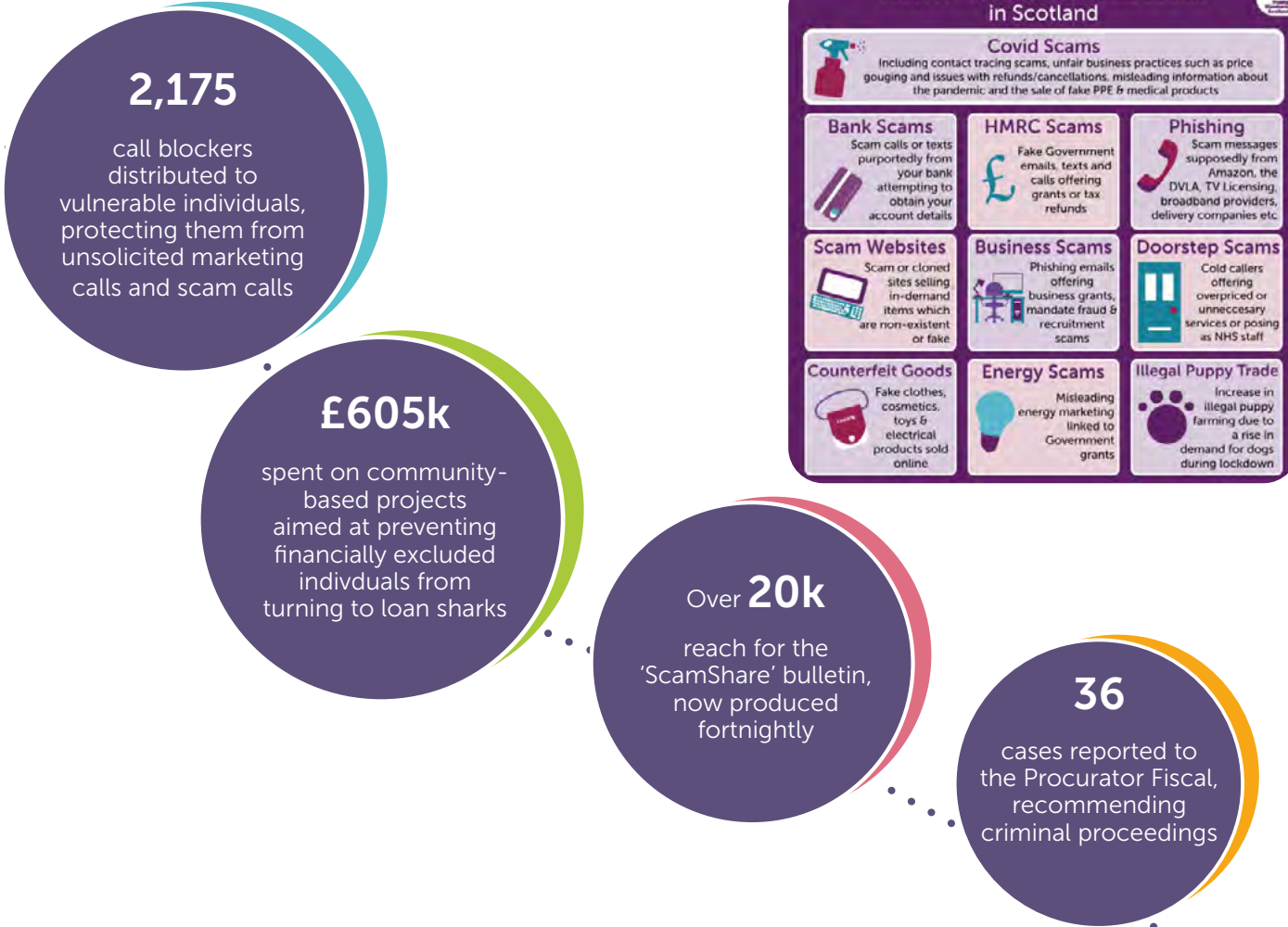
Trading Standards Scotland

Although ultimately reporting through the Community Wellbeing Board, a Trading Standards Scotland Governance Board provides political oversight to the work of the national trading standards team funded by UK Government which has a remit to tackle cross local authority boundary consumer detriment in Scotland.

It has ensured that the national enforcement team, working in partnership with local authority trading standards, focusses resources on issues that present the greatest risk to consumers and legitimate business in Scotland. When local authority protective services were called upon to enforce Covid restrictions, Trading Standards Scotland added capacity to assist in tackling rogue traders and scams.

Key Achievements

2017-2021



Featured Work

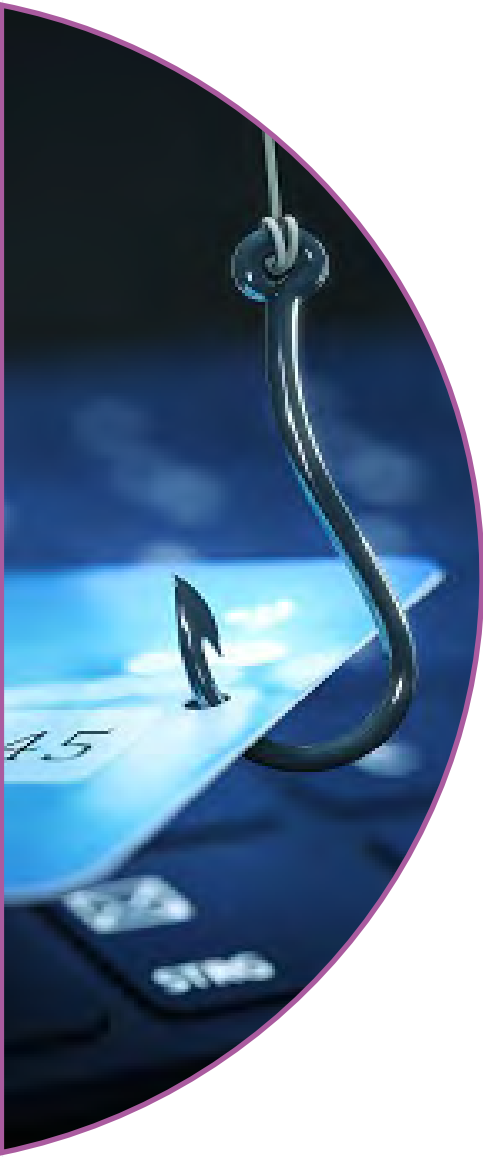
Call Blocker Dissemination

Following successful initiatives in East Renfrewshire, Angus and South Ayrshire councils, the TSS Governance Board approved funds from the national enforcement budget to make call blockers available nationally to vulnerable people experiencing high levels of nuisance calls. This attracted additional funding from Scottish Government and in the last 5 years, 2,175 call blockers have been disseminated with the assistance of local authorities and the third sector across Scotland.

It is estimated this has prevented £9,229,798 in financial detriment as well as reducing stress and anxiety levels and enabling vulnerable individuals to live independently for longer.

Illegal Money Lending No Tolerance Zones

The Governance Board has approved the awarding of a Charter Mark to organisations committed to promoting the work of the Illegal Money Lending Unit, which is part of TSS, and taking a zero-tolerance stance on illegal money lending in their communities. The first recipients of the award were the housing, care and property management company, the Wheatley Group and Step Change debt charity.



Looking Forward

The UK Government issued a consultation on the consumer protection landscape in 2021 which included the opportunity to comment on current national trading standards arrangements. The consultation sought views on how the national trading standards teams could work more closely with local services. The TSS Governance Board responded on behalf of COSLA, highlighting the necessity for better resourcing of trading standards services locally and strengthening the relationship between the national team and local teams. The UK Government is expected to publish their response early in 2022 - it is unlikely that there will be material changes to the delivery of the trading standards services.





Environment and Economy

The Environment and Economy team leads COSLA's work on a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy and supports the work of COSLA's Environment and Economy Board and Spokesperson. The delivery of a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy no later than 2045 is the strategic goal which has been set by the Board. This in turn influences all the work, including the Board's key policy priorities, which are - digital connectivity; climate change; heat and energy; the economy; Europe, international & post-EU exit; planning, place and regeneration; transport and flooding, and waste and the circular economy.

Key Achievements

Planning Bill

The Planning Bill was an early test of COSLA's ability to influence the Scottish Parliament. Engagement with Scottish Government, MSPs, and partners saw work to improve the Bill, always with a clear Local Government position. We succeeded in removing what we called the 'planning penalty clause' and improved the Scottish Government's performance proposals. An active area of work stemming from the Act is the resourcing of the new duties and the planning system more generally.

Climate Change Bill

The Climate Change Bill focused on strengthening emission reduction targets. COSLA's agreed approach was to follow the science and the advice provided by the Climate Change Commission, so we supported a new, stricter 2030 target and the 2045 net zero target. The setting of the 2045 net zero target allowed the Board to consider how it prioritised its future work to support Local Government in delivering this transition.

Crown Estate Bill

COSLA worked to secure the maximum amount of devolution possible to local authorities. Whilst the final Act did not reach our ideal 'devo-max' position, we defended the right of local authorities to manage the Crown Estate which is now much more locally responsive.

Transport Bill

COSLA's response to the Transport Bill focused initially on bus services, pavement and double parking and a new section on establishing a workplace parking levy. We lobbied for councils to have wider powers to run bus services and Scottish Government has looked again at their proposals. COSLA worked with the Scottish Government and with opposition MSPs in summer 2019 to develop a position on municipal bus services which received support in Parliament.



Agreement of the route map for the **20%** reduction to car kilometre commitment



Supporting the **Place Based Investment Programme** and continued delivery of the Regeneration Capital Grants Fund



Working with Scottish Government and the Scottish Futures Trust on the **Green Growth Accelerator**

Featured Work

EU Exit

The Environment and Economy Board was central to examining the detail of the implications for Local Government and our communities of EU Exit, and informing the negotiations with UK and Scottish Ministers. The approaching deadline brought a new urgency to the work, which included the new regulatory framework as set out in the Withdrawal Act and work to influence the replacement of European funding, which carries on to this day.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the priorities of COSLA and work of the Board overnight. COSLA worked quickly and positively with Local and Scottish Government to keep planning, waste and transport services running. Particularly, work on waste policy during the initial months of the pandemic assisted local authorities at a difficult time and forged a good partnership between Local and Scottish Government. And communities felt the benefits of continued services delivery.



Looking Forward

The pandemic illustrated in stark terms the connection between human health, the economy and the natural environment. The Board has agreed that the Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy should be the strategic goal which influences all its work. This was also our major theme for COP 26 when we successfully organised events in both the green and blue zones with a range of our national and international partners.



Health and Social Care

COSLA's Health and Social Care team supports Local Government and Integrated Joint Boards in their work to enable communities to live healthy, independent lives, and to promote positive outcomes and early prevention. The work of the Health and Social Care Board covers a range of key priorities which include supporting health and social care integration, social care support for adults and older people, mental health, public health and digital health and care.

Key Achievements

Health and Social Care Integration

Health and Social Care integration has represented a key focus of COSLA over the past 5 years, having resulted in demonstrable improvements to the health and social care system. The value of this approach was evident throughout the response to Covid-19, where integration was essential to secure an effective and co-ordinated response to the pandemic.

Digital Health and Care

COSLA's contribution was an important factor in supporting and providing people with the option of accessing health and social care services digitally, particularly in response to the pandemic. Two Digital Health and Care Strategies, of which COSLA are joint owners, have been published within the past 5 years. This is testament to the pace of change and the successful embedding of partnership working across the system.

Learning Disability, Autism and Dementia

COSLA supported updates to the Keys to Life Learning Disability Strategy, the Scottish Strategy for Autism and the National Dementia Strategy. Most recently COSLA agreed Covid recovery responses covering these three areas, which include greater involvement and representation of people with lived experience.

Suicide Prevention

The implementation of a number of the actions within the National Suicide Prevention Action Plan have been led by COSLA, in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including those with experience. These include producing local action plan guidance for local areas and supporting its use; development of suicidal crisis recommendations; ensuring the needs of children and young people are included in the work of all actions and development of a youth advisory group and work to establish multi-agency reviews of all deaths by suicide to ensure learning from these can be translated into local action.

National Care Home Contract

COSLA has played a key role in agreeing the National Care Home Contract (NCHC) each year and is represented in the Local Government negotiating team. The NCHC helps to provide a more transparent and consistent national contract and national fee for the commissioning and procurement of residential care for older people as well as providing Councils and care homes with a degree of stability and certainty to inform local commissioning and procurement strategies.



The Health and Social Care Board has expanded to include members from **Social Work Scotland, the Scottish Ambulance Service, Public Health Scotland and a carers representative**. This has led to a more integrated and inclusive approach to policy making.



The Board's response to COVID-19 has included:

- action to address pressures facing the system, including **workforce capacity challenges, supporting Fair Work in social care** and the **rollout of technology**
- development of a COSLA response to the proposals for a **National Care Service** outlined by the Scottish Government

Featured Work



Public Health

Local Government is central to leading and delivering improvement across the social determinants of health, including housing, education, environment, employment, social support and access to health and care services. That is why COSLA worked to ensure that the voice of Local Government was embedded in the development, establishment and operation of Public Health Scotland.

Through our unique joint sponsorship arrangement, securing representation on the Public Health Scotland Board and ongoing engagement across COSLAs policy portfolios, we have ensured that the new organisation is increasingly focused on delivering Local Governments priorities and aligns its national resource and expertise to support local systems.

As we continue to progress public health reform, we are working to support Public Health Scotland deploy its data and intelligence, evidence and health improvement capabilities as effectively as possible. This approach recognises that a strong and effective relationship between Public Health and Local Government will be vital to improve and protect community wellbeing.

Looking Forward

The coming years will be vital to the future of the health and social care system in Scotland as it seeks to rebuild and reform from the pandemic. The work of COSLA will be central to ensuring that the approach to this recovery empowers people, is focused on equitable outcomes, supports closer integration and shifts towards prevention.

Future work will undoubtedly focus on the Scottish Government's proposals for the creation of a National Care Service. COSLA has been at the centre of the response to this significant issue, voicing the importance of retaining the role Local Government holds in delivering care closest to the people who need it.

Business Gateway

The Business Gateway Board was established in 2018 and provides a dedicated and strong political oversight. Although local management and delivery is critical, so too is the role of the Board in providing a united Local voice. It collaborates to demonstrate Local Government's vital contribution to Scotland's economy.

Key Achievements

Start-up Support

Scotland is well known for its entrepreneurial spirit and a lightbulb idea is often the catalyst for starting a business. As entrepreneurs continue to spot gaps in the market, others are coming up with ways to improve an existing product or service. However, very few start-ups get everything right first time and Business Gateway is expertly placed to help aspiring business owners overcome these hurdles and to develop ideas into a targeted approach for a specific sector.

Business Gateway was an invaluable partner and helped me understand all the different aspects involved, ensuring I was able to quickly start trading. It's fair to say that Gecko Glazing might not even be here were it not for their support and advice.

Gareth Claase, Owner, Gecko Glazing

Planning to Start Tool

Business Gateway developed and launched a new tool - Planning to Start - specifically designed to help individuals taking the first step on their start-up journey. Individuals only need to take 10 minutes to answer some questions about their initial business idea. From there it is possible to access an instant start-up toolkit and connect with a local Business Gateway office, where a team can help create a tailored action plan. No matter what place people start from, or their background, the Planning To Start tool has been an invaluable resource for many, providing instant support to help anyone build a robust business plan and get the strongest start possible.

Online Resources

Key to our success is adapting to what our customers want – and need. And that is the ability to get business support when and where they need it. That's why we've continually evolved the resources we have online – making sure the content we have is relevant, up-to-date and engaging. From podcasts to online tutorials, we have content online across a variety of channels. We've made it possible for everyone to be able to access our support and services in the way they want.

Local Support

What sets Business Gateway apart is our local expertise and support. Wherever they are in Scotland, businesses can contact their local office and connect with one of our 170 advisers. These advisers have a wealth of expertise and knowledge about their local area and what specific support is available in that area. We know there's no 'one size fits all' with businesses – each will have individual needs. That's why our local experts are so important to what we do – they work with businesses to find the best solution.

My Business Gateway adviser has been there every step of the way to inject their expertise and provide tailored support at various stages of business development. Whether it came to writing a business plan or taking me through processing accounts, I knew I could count on Business Gateway for expert guidance. That's what is great about their services

Fiona Ritchie, Owner, Ochil Skincare



Featured Work

Covid Response

Over 6,000 start-ups were set up at a time when the UK economy recorded its worst economic performance for more than 300 years. 2020/22 was an incomparable year with Business Gateway teams providing vital support to more than 43,000 start-ups and growth businesses battling a wide range of challenges. But we didn't do it alone. Our partners within the business support network, alongside local authorities were responsible for administering a large programme of public grants to businesses across Scotland. COSLA and SLAED worked closely with the Scottish Government to design and deploy these grants to businesses at pace, and against the challenging working conditions.

As businesses struggled to survive the ongoing lockdown restrictions, Business Gateway rallied and adapted quickly. Updating and increasing digital resources to ensure ongoing support did not waiver - 3,139 webinars were delivered to 33,000 people over 12 months.

DigitalBoost

Now in its fifth year, DigitalBoost has helped thousands of Scottish businesses upskill and invest in their own training and online platforms, ensuring they are in a strong position to embrace the opportunities presented by the digital world. This programme has gone from strength to strength, following an extension by Scottish Government in 2017. Demand has continued to grow, particularly since the start of the pandemic in 2020, as businesses have faced significant challenges, with many being forced to adapt their operations and services in a move to digital platforms, building new ways of working and identifying ways to continue trading. In response to this, DigitalBoost has helped business owners retrain through popular webinars on topics such as social media, digital marketing strategies and how to sell online. However, despite this growth, the core of the programme remains the same as it was in 2016: to help business owners get online, ensure they are able to take advantage of new opportunities and develop new skills. And as the world looks to move forward from COVID-19 and the pandemic, these skills will continue to be a pillar for successful businesses across all sectors.

DigitalBoost teamed up with the Scottish Government to help deliver the DigitalBoost Development Grant. This grant helped over 4,000 SMEs access £25m in funding to help them do more with digital.

Looking Forward

To ensure we continue to provide exactly what our customers want – and need - we are currently carrying out a service design review which will give us a roadmap to move forward with. This roadmap is based on research from advisers and customers and will shape the future direction of our service.

It's now been ten years since the Christie Report offered a roadmap for reform of our public services. Few reports like it have made such a lasting impression – in fact, its recommendations continue to resonate, shaping the way the sector thinks and talks about improvement.

Even when the report was published, myjobscotland was held up as an example of what shared services can deliver, and we've come a long way since then.

Key Achievements

New Features / Services for Councils

- We began offering Health Check Surveys to all Council members. Success of this has since led us to offer this service annually;
- New function in Talentlink for allowing online referencing (Version 1);
- New function in Talentlink to offer Online Contract creation;
- Annual cost of service fixed for Councils, initially to 2020;
- Integration with SHL improved (online testing);
- New Job Wizard implemented making creation of jobs easier in Talentlink;
- Co-produced the new Recruiter Dashboard function for all Talentlink Users (worldwide);
- Rules engine (automated processes) function launched;
- Rolled out at pace Video Interviewing function to support recruitment through COVID-19;
- Commercial income keeping council membership costs for the service frozen for the third year running, but confirmed to 2024 with surpluses covering our suppliers' inflationary increments.

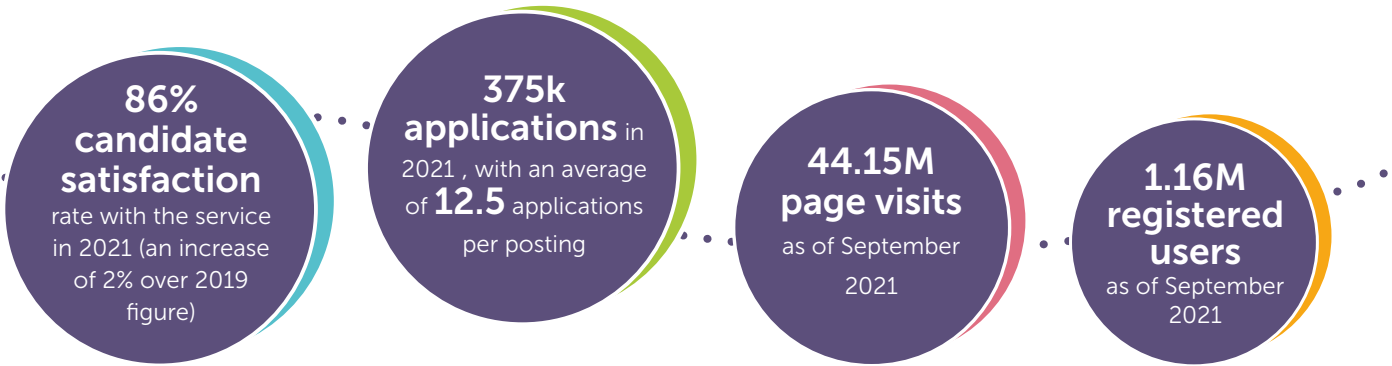
Candidate Improvements

- Launched New website (5th iteration since 2008); site became fully responsive meaning it would appear in an optimised format for all devices;
- Responsive design further extended to application forms, making it much easier to apply directly on a smartphone or tablet;
- Website Accessibility Audit carried out by Digital Accessibility Centre;
- Website updated to support addition of hybrid working opportunities, new Health & Social Care Partnership pages, and extension of the Social Care section due to the extension of the Adult Social Care campaign.

Operational and Technical Achievements

- Improved real-time reporting;
- Applicant Tracking System (Talentlink) moved to the cloud (Amazon Web Services);
- myjobscotland.gov.uk moved to the cloud (Amazon Web Services);
- Opened site to private Early Years providers through Scottish Government support towards the 1,400 hours implementation;

- myjobscotland Governance Board formed in 2019;
- Opened site to Third Sector and Private Social Care providers through Scottish Government support for SSSC and CC registered organisations;
- Issued Terms of Use document to all Councils;
- Completed full accessibility website requirements (including the third party hosted application form to be delivered in Early 2022);
- Adult Social Care advertising extended to the end of March 2022;
- Launch of myjobscotland quarterly newsletter to maintain service visibility across the local government family.



Featured Work

People, Partnership, Prevention and Performance

Put in terms of Christie's four P's – People, Partnership, Prevention and Performance – myjobscotland today offers an excellent example of what happens when public bodies work together.

The Partnership and Performance aspects are clear – ours is an integrated service where all the councils, other bodies and third sector partners all gain from the collective, removing the need for the duplicated efforts of individual recruitment processes and platforms.

We are, of course, a People-centric organisation, empowering candidates (not least through our recently launched Career Hub), and we rely heavily on feedback from users and partners to shape the continued development of our website, as well as extending the functions we offer to our Councils in the applicant tracking system.

And, as for Prevention of negative outcomes, we think that effective recruitment means better staff retention, performance, and development, all of which will play a part – even if it's not our primary impact.

Looking Forward

It's far from job done; a big part of our success is the constant cycle of feedback and improvement, powered by the kind of reinvestment that just doesn't happen in the private sector, as the fees we collect go back into the service, making it a self-funded, ever-improving tool for local government, and with a cost for the technology less than £15 per job the value for money of the service is unarguable.



Keeping COSLA Working

Looking after COSLA's people, finances, infrastructure, technology, and assets matters. It matters because, in the simplest terms, we must achieve the maximum impact for our members with the resources we have.

The last 5 years has seen a steady focus on improving work behind the scenes to achieve greater business resilience and accountability. In March 2020, the need for resilience became greater than ever, when COSLA employees took home their laptops and began working remotely: our people, with the help of technology, stepped up in unprecedented circumstances to support councils to respond to the pandemic in their own local communities.

COSLA works collaboratively with partner organisations, such as the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland, and we have made the most of those partnerships too in the area of staff development, ensuring we share expertise and maximise value for money. In addition, we have used secondments to help embed cross-organisational working.

Key Achievements

Conference Centre

Each year, COSLA holds an Annual Conference and Excellence Awards, keynote events in the Scottish Local Government calendar, attracting all 32 Scottish Councils public, private and voluntary sector partners. These events are an opportunity to showcase and recognise the truly excellent work which takes place to deliver essential public services. COSLA's Conference Centre in Edinburgh can host meetings of 10 to 200 delegates. From 2017 until March 2020 the Centre was an income generator for COSLA, hosting more than 2000 events annually. As well as income generation the centre is the venue for our in-person Governance meetings such as Leaders, Convention and Boards and is also used by our Member Councils, public and private sector partners.

The Conference Centre was closed from March 2020 as a result of COVID, when COSLA's internal governance meetings, including the Annual Conference and Excellence Awards Ceremony, moved to a virtual platform, allowing all business and political structures to remain uninterrupted

and, at times, meet more frequently. As we move forward and restrictions are lifted, all necessary processes and covid compliant certificates have been put in place to welcome our clients back. COSLA has invested in the facility to ensure that hybrid solutions are in place to accommodate meetings where there is a mix of in-person and remote delegates.



Financial Management

- At the beginning of April 2017, COSLA employed 74 people, and had reserves of £614,000. Fast forward 5 years and those numbers have increased to **97** and **£1,324,000**. This reflects both the increasing breadth and depth of the areas of interest for our members, largely by developing our relationship with the Scottish Government across policy areas of mutual interest and benefit, and the prudent financial management required when looking after our funders' resources.
- We also like to practice what we preach. Having had success at persuading members that a two-year budget (covering 2019/20 and 2020/21) provided some stability for planning, this was followed up with a **four-year budget** being agreed in March 2021, allowing us to face the future with more confidence.

Political Governance

- A revised COSLA Constitution approved by Convention in November 2021 and the development of associated standing orders
- Quick adaptations of processes to run large political governance meetings **remotely with 100+ participants** in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- During COVID, support for a doubling of the frequency of Leaders meetings** to keep timely political governance at the heart of COSLA's work during the fast-paced developments around Covid-19.



People Management

- Improved engagement with staff, including a Trade Union recognition agreement (2019), staff surveys and regular communications.
- From March 2020, facilitation of remote working for all staff.
- A new Staff Development Programme including coaching, people management leadership.
- Enhanced support for Employee Wellbeing.
- Development of the role of Policy Assistant across all teams, offering opportunities for graduates to gain experience across all policy areas.

Data Protection

- In 2018, COSLA put General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) training at the heart of its induction process for new employees and developed a training programme for existing staff members. Since then, all COSLA staff have received refresher GDPR training, with this continuing to be rolled out in 2022.
- Since 2018, COSLA has continued to hone and develop policies and processes to work towards GDPR compliance.

ICT

- In 2020, a review of COSLA's ICT infrastructure identified and mitigated substantial risks to the organisation including cyber security, data management, and points of failure due to legacy systems.
- Additional cost savings were also identified as a result of this business improvement and efficiency process, and this has been reinvested in core ICT infrastructure.
- We look forward to benefitting from the expertise and knowledge of the Digital Office early in 2022 when they transfer into the COSLA family (from the Improvement Service).



COSLA

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