

ESSENTIAL EVERYDAY

COSLA is the national 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.

Millions of people rely on the services that Local Government in Scotland delivers every day. Together, councils spend almost £19 billion a year on local services and employ over 250,000 people – nearly 10% of all employment in Scotland.

COSLA IS OUR MEMBERS:

Our job is to stand up for Local Government and the people that we employ to represent it effectively and fairly. We are a councillor-led, cross party organisation, representing all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. Our work is on behalf of our members to focus on their priorities, challenges and opportunities. We do so by positively engaging with governments and others on **policy, powers, funding and legislation**.

COSLA has a unique and strong position which puts it in the best position to influence and impact, championing councils' vital work and securing the resources and powers they need to do what works locally. COSLA is working for Local Government to enable delivery on the National Performance Framework in partnership across Scotland to achieve the best outcome for our people, our communities and our nation.

COSLA was established in 1975 but today we're here to:

- **ENGAGE** in key financial, legislative and policy developments to ensure they have the best possible impact
- **LEAD** reforms that improve public services and save money effectively
- **DEVELOP** partnerships with Scottish, UK and international governments, parliaments, and the third and private sectors
- **NEGOTIATE** fair and affordable pay and workforce conditions on behalf of all councils
- **CAMPAIGN** on the issues that matter to our members, and promote the image and reputation of Local Government
- **SUPPORT** councils to work together, and deliver shared services that increase their capacity
- **CHAMPION** the role of Local Government in the governance of Scotland, and lobby for stronger local democracy and community empowerment

What we do, and how we do it, is decided democratically by elected Councillors from across all our member councils.

OUR CURRENT PRIORITIES:

We're here to help councils build better and more equal local communities. To do that we want to empower local decision making and enable councils to do what works locally.

COSLA has a unique and strong position to influence and drive forward policy and legislation to support our vision. Convention provided strategic direction for our work through the COSLA Plan 2017-22 and ten game changing priorities were identified and provide the focus of our work.

This Progress Report demonstrates some of the key successes and impact COSLA has had so far in 2020/21 in delivering priority areas.

1	Democracy and Reform	<i>Empowering local people through strong local democratic rights and elected leadership and rethinking public services through collective reform of public services focused on local places.</i>
2	A United Voice for Local Government	<i>Strengthening and developing the way COSLA works by focusing on its members, communicating effectively, and championing key issues.</i>
3	UK Exit from the European Union	<i>Securing a strong voice for Local Government throughout negotiations, devolution of powers in the new landscape, and support for councils to address change.</i>
4	Local Government Funding	<i>Getting a fair deal for COSLA members on public spending priorities and negotiating greater local financial freedoms and powers.</i>
5	Local Economies and Inclusive Growth	<i>Building strong and sustainable communities by enabling councils to drive inclusive economic growth and investment in business support, economic development, skills and regeneration.</i>
6	Education and Children's Services	<i>Working with councils 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.</i>
7	Health and Social Care	<i>Supporting Local Government and Integrated Joint Boards to address demographic and financial challenges, enabling communities to live healthy, independent lives, and promoting an outcomes and prevention culture.</i>
8	Equality, Representation and Diversity	<i>Developing the diversity of local elected representatives, addressing barriers, and encouraging and supporting a wider range of people to vote and come forward as candidates, and identifying changes in culture and practices that further open up Scotland's democracy.</i>
9	Strong, Safe, and Sustainable Communities	<i>Tackling poverty and inequalities, protecting the vulnerable, and strengthening communities and improving their safety and sustainability.</i>
10	Effective Shared Services	<i>Continuously improving the myjobscotland, Trading Standards Scotland, and Business Gateway services we provide directly for councils and their partners.</i>

COSLA's work is very diverse and this progress report merely highlights a part of the key work we deliver on behalf of our members. These priorities are embedded through Convention, Leaders and Boards to drive forward our work in all areas.

COVID 19 RESPONSE

Our impact:

COSLA has worked with councils throughout the response to COVID-19, seeking to support communities and our workforce to respond to the unprecedented challenges that have emerged because of the pandemic. As is reflected throughout this report, we have stood at the centre of policy making at a national level in response to the pandemic. This has included taking a significant role in initiatives developed across a range of sectors – for example health and social care, education, housing, the environment and with respect to local economies – and to support vulnerable communities. We have ensured a consistent partnership approach in our engagement across Local Government and with external partners, including the Scottish Government, working constructively at all times, but also providing the necessary challenge where required.

In addition to the approach outlined above, COSLA has sought to support the Local Government response to COVID-19 in several ways including, but not restricted to, the following:

- Representing the views of Local Government in the development of national programmes created in response to COVID-19, such as Shielding, Test and Protect and Business Grants.
- Representing the voice of Local Government in key national forums, including meetings of SGoRR (Scottish Government Resilience Room), chaired by the First Minister.
- Securing additional funding and financial flexibilities to support councils in a time of significant budgetary pressure.
- Developing guidance and frameworks to support and provide assurance on issues of vital importance to the Local Government workforce, such as health and safety in workplace settings, and to support vulnerable groups such as people with No Recourse to Public Funds and to tackle violence against women and girls during COVID-19.
- Promoting the views of Local Government to the Scottish Parliament, including through written submissions to requests for evidence, regular appearances in front of Parliamentary committees and through scrutiny of COVID specific legislation.
- Improving communications across Local Government of COVID-19 developments through the creation of a dedicated weekly Elected Member Bulletin and the creation of a K-Hub resource for shared resources and learning.

How we achieved it:

The initial response to COVID-19 necessitated a fundamental change in how COSLA operates as an organisation, with a re-prioritisation of ongoing work and resource to support the effort to respond to the developing pandemic. This involved the redeployment of staff to support the development and delivery of new programmes and initiatives, using resources in the manner most consistent with making the greatest impact. More, it involved the closure of COSLA premises and embracing a home-based approach to working.

Recognising the importance of quick action and clear communication at the outset of the pandemic, COSLA increased the number of meetings of political leaders to ensure that key decisions were made in as timely a manner as possible and provided a new source of communication to all councillors through our dedicated weekly bulletin. COSLA has also embraced a clear partnership approach by working closely with Council Leaders, councillors, chief executives, officers and partners including Trade Unions to ensure that policy making in response to COVID-19 is reflective of the leadership role of Local Government and we

continue to engage with the Scottish Government to ensure our voice is clearly represented in the decision-making process.

Going forward:

The response to COVID-19 will be the primary concern that councils will face for the near future, and COSLA will continue to represent the voice of Local Government at every opportunity. Utilising the platform and national leadership role that we have built in response to the pandemic, COSLA will continue to ensure that Local Government is at the centre of policy development and decision making, whilst championing the action taken by councils to support communities during this challenging time.

We also recognise the importance of communicating a vision for Scotland beyond COVID-19, with an empowered Local Government standing at its centre. Local Government and its workforce have a vital role to play in Scotland's recovery and renewal and this role is at the heart of COSLA's recently published Blueprint for Local Government. This aspirational Blueprint sets out a vision of a Scotland based on the empowerment of people and communities through the strengthening of local democratic decision making.

DEMOCRACY AND REFORM - Empowering local people through strong local democratic rights and elected leadership and rethinking public services through collective reform of public services focused on local places.

Local Governance Review

Our Impact:

COSLA has worked with Scottish Government, Councils and partners to continue to focus the Local Governance Review on the whole system. We have and will continue to be absolutely clear that true community empowerment relies on the devolution of power to Local Authorities from national bodies as much as it does from councils to communities and that these cannot be separated. As the review entered phase 2 COSLA gained the commitment of the Joint Political Oversight Group to establish and agree principles for pilots that the focus on the three empowerments of community, fiscal and functional, with equality and diversity and strengthening local democracy at their heart. Our position remains that parity of esteem and mutual respect are core to the spheres of government relationship and the review must be taken forward in this way.

How we achieved it:

The COVID response has meant a pause in the review, however, in agreement with Scottish Government COSLA is once again supporting all authorities who wish to consider new governance arrangements that have a genuine focus on public services and not solely Local Government. As such work has begun again to review pilot proposals submitted seeking to highlight the range of potential improvements, that are to be prioritised, demonstrate the opportunity to empower local government and its partners and to ultimately work more collaboratively by providing levers for change.

The practical steps to progress the agenda have been:

- Writing in November 2019 to all public service leaders providing an update on the review overall
- Setting a 27 March deadline for councils to submit their proposals, now extended until the end of October
- a reminder of the on-going connections to the other key areas of work on community and fiscal empowerment

Work also took place to develop a proposal for a fiscal framework which set out fundamental aims of:

- Re-balancing the relationship between the spheres of Government to ensure increased flexibility in how resources are deployed locally;
- Empowering Local Government to deploy resources, without restriction, for the benefit of communities;
- Ensure that equalisation is a critical element of the Local Government funding mechanism ensure full and where there is any agreement to shift funding, there is proper consideration of the impacts on equalisation.

Going forward:

COSLA will continue to work closely with Scottish Government, Councils and partners to establish meaningful pilots that can shape an enhanced future for local democracy that embraces subsidiarity and enables decisions to be taken as close to the people that they affect. This means ensuring a place-based approach that is not a one size fits all and allows us to embrace a preventative and sustainable approach to service delivery.

European Charter for Local Self-Government (Scotland) Incorporation Bill

Our Impact:

The incremental progress toward reaching our current point began in August 2018 when COSLA Leaders agreed COSLA's response to an initial consultation, by Andy Wightman MSP, on proposals for a Member's Bill to incorporate into Scots Law the European Charter of Local Self-Government with the aim of strengthening the status and standing of Local Government. In addition, a programme of parliamentary work to highlight key elements of our position with parliamentarians was agreed. This included the development of an MSP briefing and associated material for all MSPs. COSLA made a substantial response to the consultation and had worked proactively with Andy Wightman MSP in support of the Members Bill which was presented to the Scottish Parliament on 9 May 2020.

How we achieved it:

Our lobbying of Scottish Parliamentarians coupled with a pro-active media campaign – which includes a publicly available podcast featuring COSLA's Presidential Team together with Andy Wightman – has kept this ambition in the political and public arena. We continue to lobby at every opportunity the importance of this Bill in so far as it will provide a strong legal foundation for Local Government in Scotland. Our written evidence, which drew heavily on the extensive response to the earlier consultation, was submitted to the lead committee in September 2020.

Going forward:

Led by the Scottish Parliament's Communities and Local Government Committee, the Bill is now well into stage one. We anticipate further progress, with a call for oral evidence, to commence in early November. We will continue to build on the significant cross-party support, seeking a positive reception from the Scottish Government, as the Bill progresses through Parliament.

A UNITED VOICE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – Strengthening and developing the way COSLA works by focusing on its members, communicating effectively, and championing key issues

COSLA champions the voice of Local Government in representing the position of its members through continuous engagement with the UK and Scottish Parliaments, partners in the public private and third sectors, and our communities, and the media.

Our interactions with the Parliaments are both substantive and impactful. By engaging in all aspects of the parliamentary process, from conception of a Bill to Royal Assent, COSLA presents a united voice for Local Government to parliamentarians and to the Scottish and UK Parliaments as a whole. As a result, COSLA is regularly cited in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament as a key influencer and many of the issues that COSLA engages in are central to the whole parliamentary agenda.

At every opportunity, COSLA also responds to many formal and informal consultations relevant to Local Government, positions are discussed and agreed through our governance structures of Convention, Leaders and Boards.

The *Invest in Essential Services* campaign was conducted throughout the budget period last year. Our campaign of parliamentary engagement was vital in highlighting the essential services that Local Government and our workforce provide across all of Scotland and, consequently, elevating these topics to the forefront of the political debate. Through a comprehensive campaign of engagement with the Parliament and the media, COSLA secured alterations from the original budget settlement. The intention is to continue this work in the upcoming budget period.

COSLA provides strong representation at both UK and Scottish Government committees through written and oral evidence. This enables us to influence directly developing policy and legislation to get the best for Local Government and our communities.

Further, COSLA regularly provides briefings to MPs and MSPs on key issues to inform and influence debates and decisions. Similarly, COSLA shares key information with SPICe, which is used to inform MSPs to ensure the Local Government voice and position is accurately reflected on a range of issues. Going forward, COSLA will continue to influence national debate at every opportunity.

Local Government Blueprint:

Our Impact:

COSLA launched a new Blueprint for Scottish Local Government, which sets out an ambitious vision for Scotland's future - one based on the empowerment of people and communities. The Blueprint sought to put forward a clear platform for Local Government as the anchor for our communities as we continue to respond to COVID-19 and as we look forward to the longer term.

The document (which can be viewed [here](#)) is framed around 6 key themes for Local Government:

- 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

The COSLA Blueprint for Local Government was launched in September. It was accompanied by a comprehensive campaign of media and social media activity and political engagement, which was led by the COSLA Vice-President. The document has received significant traction both across its individual themes and taken as a whole and has provided a dedicated platform for Local Government to engage on.

How We Achieved This:

A comprehensive process of engagement process accompanied the development of the text of the Blueprint provided to ensure that it reflected the views of Local Government taken as a whole, and the reflection of wider civic society in Scotland. This included, but was not restricted to, the following:

- A series of workshops with both Leaders and SOLACE portfolio holders, which were facilitated by James Mitchell, Professor of Public Policy at Edinburgh University.
- Engagement with organisations and stakeholders including, but not restricted to, SCVO, Young Scot, Community Justice Scotland, Professor Mitchell and Professor Alan Miller, Independent Co-Chair of the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership.
- The production of a working draft of the Blueprint for consideration and comment for Council Leaders.

Going Forward:

COSLA will continue to engage on the Blueprint for Local Government in the coming months, working with partners across Local Government, to ensure that its key aims are reflected in policy development and decision making at a national level.

Annual Conference and Excellence Awards:

The COSLA Annual Conference is the keynote event in the Scottish Local Government Calendar. Whilst the Excellence Awards provide the largest celebration of the achievements of the Local Government Workforce and innovative service delivery in the country. The combined event provides the opportunity to highlight and celebrate the great work and achievements of Local Government. The event also provides an opportunity to share innovation and best practice throughout the sphere of Governance. Unfortunately, due to COVID, we took the early decision to cancel both the Annual Conference and Awards in 2020. We look forward to recommencing these next year. It is also hoped, should Leaders agree, to have a virtual mini Conference without the Awards in March 2021.

UK EXIT FROM THE EU – Securing a strong voice for Local Government throughout negotiations, achieving devolution of powers in the new landscape, and supporting councils to address change

Resilience Planning & Policy Development

Our impact:

COSLA continues to influence the Local Government agenda, as an example securing further resources of £2.9m to fund additional Environmental Health support posts for a year to help deal with the increased workload required after the end of the Transition Period as well as the ongoing work on Covid. We are currently pressing to extend funding for Brexit support officers, also beyond the end of the Transition Period. We continue to campaign for clarification of the detail of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, but meantime have worked with partners to design a template for the Scottish part of it. COSLA politicians have influenced the need for proper consideration of devolved issues through fora like the MHCLG EU Exit Transition Delivery Group and have identified and lobbied on issues common to other UK local authority associations through the UK Local Government Forum and meetings with the LGA, WLGA and NILGA including pressing for the involvement of Local Government in the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through a formal consultation. Concerted lobbying with our partners has also resulted in the establishment of the UK Committee of the Regions Contact Group which will meet for the first time 16 November; the focus will be on the post Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU from a local and regional perspective. Engagement, again at both political and official levels, has ensured the priority risks are known to the Scottish and UK Governments going forward.

How we achieved it:

We continue to hold regular conference calls and webinars with all 32 member councils and have embarked on a further programme of meetings with individual councils which has provided us with up to date post Covid-19 information on local issues allowing COSLA to share information secured from UK and Scottish Governments as the UK's exit from the EU continues to unfold. These calls also provided an opportunity for councils to share knowledge and good practice. In terms of the provision of Export Health Certificates, COSLA has continued our work with professional associations (such as the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland and the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland), the Scottish Government, and councils to develop possible solutions to any increased demand resulting from the UK's exit from the EU.

Going forward:

As we approach the end of the UK EU Exit Transition period we are aware that our withdrawal from the EU will be far from the end of the journey, so COSLA is continuing to monitor the risks through a revised monitoring framework which will continue to be revised to keep us on track beyond 31 December 2020. We will continue lobbying around the devolution of powers to Local Government and influencing the focus and detail of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and we are currently working with civil servants to ensure that the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill provides for Local Government to be formally consulted whenever ministers wish to introduce new relevant obligations to keep pace with EU standards. The EU exit agenda is still very much alive and COSLA will continue to be responsive to emerging issues and ensure Local Government positions are lobbied at all levels through all appropriate channels.

EU Settlement Scheme:

Our impact:

COSLA is working in partnership with IOM, a UN agency, to provide Scotland-wide assistance to councils to identify and assist vulnerable EEA nationals to apply for settled status. This work is critical for ensuring vulnerable people can remain in the UK after Brexit and access the same services they can access now. COSLA is also working with UK Government to ensure councils have access to communication materials, application statistics, toolkits and guidance to support EEA nationals in their communities.

How we achieved it:

We have an IOM OISC-registered caseworker based in COSLA to provide support and immigration advice for councils. COSLA and IOM have met with local authorities and hosted awareness raising sessions with frontline staff. These sessions raise awareness of the EUSS; ensure that frontline staff recognise that they play a key role in identifying and supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals to gain status; and clarify how they can refer individuals / families to the IOM caseworker. Demand is high for this valuable service and we are looking at opportunities to expand this caseworker model.

Going forward:

COSLA has recently secured funding from Scottish Government for an additional IOM caseworker in Scotland. COSLA is working with Scottish Government and the Home Office to secure a third case worker who will focus on assisting local authorities to support looked-after children and care leavers through the application process.

This work has changed in light of COVID-19 – we have moved to online awareness raising events and casework (although face to face is now being reintroduced in some circumstances). The pandemic has created further complexities, e.g. temporary closure of UK Government Resolution Centre and Consulates. COSLA has written to the Home Secretary to request an extension of the EUSS in light of these challenges. We continue to raise these issues through, for example, meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland and relevant UK Government departments.

End of Freedom of Movement and New Points-Based Immigration System

Our impact:

COSLA has an ongoing commitment to highlight the positive benefits of migration and to lobby for a post-Brexit immigration system that can meet Scotland's economic, workforce, and demographic needs at a local, as well as a national level. In February 2020, the Home Secretary announced a new points-based immigration system, which will take effect from 1 January 2021. The new system will replace European free movement, and EU and non-EU citizens will come under the same system. The aim of the proposed new system is to reduce immigration, and it will focus on 'highly skilled' and 'skilled' workers. There will be no route for 'low-skilled' or a temporary work route and the general salary threshold will be lowered from £30,000 to £25,600. The proposed system will have negative implications for Scottish Local Government and Scotland in general. We have significant concerns for some sectors, such as social care, and how they will cope with the replacement of free movement with this more stringent immigration system. COSLA is ensuring that the UK Government

understands Scottish Local Government concerns regarding these changes to the immigration system.

How we achieved it:

COSLA has hosted two roundtable meetings with local authorities and the Director of Future Border and Immigration System at the Home Office to ensure that senior officials in UK Government hear directly from Scottish councils on the importance of a flexible immigration system that can meet Scotland's needs. COSLA submitted written evidence to the Public Bill Committee relating to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill. COSLA, in consultation with our member councils, has submitted two responses to the Migration Advisory Committee call for evidence on the salary thresholds and an 'Australian style' points-based system (Nov 19) and the Shortage Occupation List (June 20). We received formal written evidence from a total of 18 local authorities. COSLA has been working closely with the independent Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population to look at how the ending of free movement and the future UK immigration policy will affect Scotland and the potential impacts on Scottish Councils. The COSLA President has raised our concerns in ministerial meetings with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Alistair Jack, and his Undersecretary, Iain Stewart.

Going forward:

COSLA will continue to argue for an immigration system that recognises high value jobs that are crucial to our communities over arbitrary skills and salary thresholds. We will look at every avenue to highlight our concerns with, and lobby for appropriate changes to, the future UK immigration system.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING – Getting a fair deal for COSLA Members on public spending priorities and negotiating greater local financial freedoms and powers

FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Since the end of March, the Local Government Finance team has been focused on ensuring that Councils have the resources they require to support individuals, families, communities and business during the pandemic, and to keep essential, everyday services going. We have also been collecting information from Councils on the financial pressures facing councils – once all known funding is factored in, there is still a gap of around £350m that councils are addressing using a series of strategies such as use of reserves, re-prioritisation etc.

A series of COVID-related consequentials have been announced by UK Government for policy areas such as health, business, and Local Government. COSLA has advocated for as much of this resource to be routed through Councils as possible, allowing a truly local and flexible response. As of 9th Oct, Scotland has received a guaranteed £7.2b in consequentials – of this, £254m has been passed to Local Government for flexible use, and around £455m has been provided for specific purposes such as Scottish Welfare Fund, provision of Free School Meals and Additional Teaching and support staff.

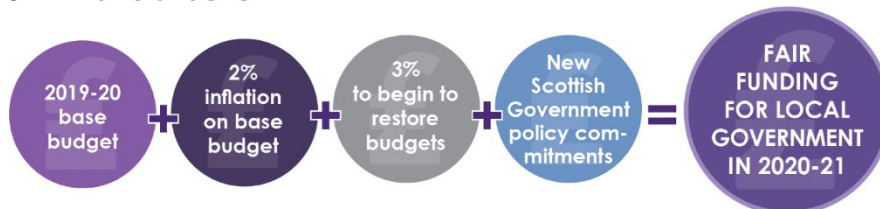
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET FOR 2020/21

Our impact:

Even before COVID, this was another challenging year for Local Government Finance, with delays to the 2020/21 UK and Scottish Budget announcements (something that will now be replicated for the forthcoming financial year). By stressing the impact delays would have on Local Government services and communities, COSLA secured a commitment from Scottish Government for an early budget. This was published on 6 February, prior to the UK Budget announcement on 11 March, securing greater certainty for Councils.

To influence the 2020/21 Budget, COSLA championed the case for Local Government through our Spending Review campaign. In January COSLA launched our *Invest in Essential Services* lobbying document, focusing on 4 main priorities where the role of Councils is key to success – inclusive economic growth, wellbeing, tackling child poverty and addressing climate change. A proactive campaign promoted the imperative of investing so Local Government can, in turn, invest in people, places and local economies. COSLA believes this is fundamental to delivering the National Performance Framework outcomes.

Our **financial asks** were clear:



For **Revenue**, this means an additional £1,007m.

For **Capital**, this means an additional £157m.

The Draft Scottish Budget revealed significant shortfalls for both revenue and capital funding. In response, the publication of COSLA's *Budget Reality* document propelled Local Government funding to the heart of debate on the Scottish Budget and ensured that national

and local media, and opposition Parties within the Scottish Parliament could champion our cause. As a result of our efforts, we secured the following from the original draft Budget:

- £95m revenue funding to meet the shortfall for Scottish Government's new and existing policy commitments
- £40m additional specific capital grant to support net-zero ambitions

Our lobbying around funding for inflation, restoration and additional capital will continue.

How we achieved it:

COSLA designed and delivered a proactive media and lobbying campaign on our asks for Local Government in the lead up to the Budget. In addition, throughout the year, COSLA proactively engaged with Ministers and all Parliamentary Parties in discussions around the importance of fair funding for Local Government. This work has been an ongoing priority, and one that is not reserved solely for the Budget period.

Going forward:

Although our work to secure a 3-year settlement for 2021/22 continued in the first part of the year, the reality of the current context (including the UK Government's decision not to publish an Autumn Budget) is that it will be another one year budget, and it will be delayed. However, as we move into 2021/22, our aspiration is to provide councils and communities with more certainty and stability, something that is now more important than ever.

Other Key Achievements:

- Strong partnership working with Professional Associations to incorporate a wide range of perspectives into our *Invest in Essential Services* document.
- A written commitment from Scottish Government to take forward, at pace, work on the development of a Fiscal Framework – this should result in longer term certainty in relation to budgets, local tax raising powers, and greater local flexibility on how resources can be deployed.
- Full devolution of Empty Property Relief for Non-Domestic Rates as a result of COSLA's lobbying efforts, and Ministerial and Cross-Party engagement.
- Implemented joint guidance between COSLA and Scottish Government to inform distribution of all new policy funding for Local Government, ensuring that funding decisions are taken through our robust joint governance arrangements.
- Constructive cross-party talks between COSLA and Scottish Government on a replacement for Council Tax.
- Regular and proactive engagement with Audit Scotland and SPICe, with work well underway to establish shared definitions and terminology for use across our respective publications on Local Government finance.
- Ongoing close working with the CIPFA Directors of Finance Section on key issues affecting Councils, for example in relation to Local Authority Loans Fund Regulations.

LOCAL ECONOMIES AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH – Building strong and sustainable communities by enabling councils to drive inclusive growth and investment in business support, economic development, skills and regeneration.

The work of COSLA has changed to adept to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are now applying the lessons of the pandemic to our long-term work which is focused around the strategic goal of a Just Transition to a net zero economy no later than 2045.

Business Support:

Covid-19 Support Grants:

Our Impact:

Since the March 2020 lockdown COSLA and Local Government have worked closely with Scottish Government to channel funding support to businesses affected by the crisis. Within a few days of the lockdown a steering group of COSLA, Local Government and Scottish Government officers developed an application process and guidance for the rates based Small Business Grant. These were then managed and delivered locally with support from Local Government Finance, Economic Development and Business Gateway personnel. Between the end of March and early July, when the scheme closed, Local Government received and processed around 100,000 applications and delivered almost £1bn in funding support through the Small Business Grant. Local Government also took on the delivery of the Newly Self-employed Hardship Fund and support for Bed and Breakfast establishments as well as supporting the enterprise agencies in delivering the Pivotal Enterprise Resilience Fund and the Creative, Tourism and Hospitality Hardship Fund.

How we achieved it:

The Steering Group included COSLA Finance and Business Gateway National Unit, Local Government Finance and Economic Development colleagues and Scottish Government Civil Servants. The Group developed the necessary guidance and application process for the various funds that Local Government had agreed to disburse. The Group met every week as the Small Business Grant evolved to address emerging issues through an issues log and guidance was updated accordingly.

Going forward:

Local Government has demonstrated the ability to move quickly to deliver substantial support across the whole of Scotland and this has been recognised by Scottish Government Ministers. At the time of writing Local Government is once again rising to the challenge in delivering funding to businesses affected by the most recent central belt lockdown building on the experience of the local lockdown in Aberdeen.

Pivoting Business Gateway Services:

Our Impact:

The Business Gateway service has risen to the challenge of delivering business support services in new ways and responding to an increase in enquiries from businesses concerned about the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis. In the first few months of 2020-21 we have seen a 23% increase in enquiries to 10,500. Attendees at our webinars (which replaced our workshop catalogue to comply with restrictions) has more than doubled year on year to 10,800 in the first quarter. There has been a significant increase in businesses

attending Growth and DigitalBoost webinars. We have also seen a 40% increase in website sessions in the first few months to 340,000.

How we achieved it:

The Business Gateway service delivered by Local Government is built round a combination of one to many and 1-2-1 support. The one to many supports is through the online resources available on the website and through a catalogue of workshops. The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 meant that we could not deliver workshops in the same way and we had to quickly pivot the service to being delivered digitally and online via webinars. At the same time our advisers were working virtually to support businesses in being more resilient and to survive the economic impact and to support delivery of funding.

Going forward:

What we have learned from this is there is a huge appetite for online information through webinars and this has proven to be a cost-effective way of delivering advice, guidance and training to businesses. It allows us to reach many more businesses and, by recording these and also developing online tutorials and other online resources, we are able to provide a 24/7 service. Consequently, this will form a part of the mix of services we will provide. Our current and future marketing campaigns will continue to drive clients to the services provided. In addition, we continue to work with partners on joint campaign activity to drive clients to where the best information, advice and guidance can be found. For example, the Scottish Government guidance for businesses available on their website.

DigitalBoost:

Our Impact:

By delivering an effective programme over the last four years the Business Gateway National Unit and Local Government have been successful in securing funding from the Government for another year for this successful programme. The Covid-19 crisis has shown businesses that digital is an essential part of their business and this has increased demand for the services. This, in turn, has led to the Government agreeing additional funding for this year which is being used to develop new services to reach more businesses.

How we achieved it:

The DigitalBoost Programme is managed through a Programme Office in the National Unit and overseen by a Steering Group, whose members include officers from the National Unit, the Business Gateway Operational Network and Scottish Government all working in partnership to deliver a service that continues to be highly valued by businesses.

Going forward:

The crisis has been particularly serious for the Tourism sector. The Programme has been working in partnership with other players such as VisitScotland and the enterprise agencies to ensure a collaborative approach and to make sure the client gets the best service possible. With the imminent publication of the Tourism Task Force report, and an expected call for further work to support this sector, VisitScotland and the National Unit are in discussion to look at what more can be done to deliver the right support at the right time.

Transport:

Our impact:

We supported emergency changes to regulations and guidance on public transport and parking. We agreed with Scottish Government support for bus companies which operated local and dedicated school travel, contributed to the development of national guidance for safe reopening of schools and we worked with partners to encourage active travel and on the implementation of the spaces for people programme.

How we achieved it:

We worked closely with Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland and the Local Government professional associations SCOTS and ATCO to respond effectively to the impact of travel restrictions. We met with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss the impact of the pandemic on transport and to raise concerns at the time about the spaces for people programme. We also have worked closely with Sustrans, the British Parking Association and bus operators when required.

Going forward:

The Environment and Economy Board has agreed to prioritise work on public transport, active travel and electric vehicle policy in order to contribute to the strategic goal of a Just Transition. We will also be working on the implementation of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and the implementation of the National Transport Strategy which have both been delayed as a result of the pandemic

Waste:

Our impact:

With local authority waste managers and SOLACE, we coordinated the flow of information and intelligence on the impact of the pandemic on local waste services to Scottish Government. We worked with Zero Waste Scotland on public communications campaigns and we successfully worked with all our partners and the unions to reopen household waste recycling centres at the start of June.

How we achieved it:

We had daily contact with officer association and Scottish Government at the height of the pandemic focused and in preparation for the reopening of household waste recycling centres. With colleagues in the Employers team we engaged with unions on changes to local waste services.

Going forward:

The focus now is now on delivering the benefits of a circular economy. With Scottish Government, we are working on refreshing the household waste recycling charter to prepare for extended producer responsibility. This will utilise the £70 million funding announced by Scottish Government in the programme for Government. We are also working to support the implementation by 2025 of the bans on biodegradable waste to landfill.

EQUALITY, REPRESENTATION AND DIVERSITY - developing the diversity of local elected representatives, addressing barriers, and encouraging and supporting a wider range of people to vote and come forward as candidates, and identifying changes in culture that further open up Scotland's democracy.

Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group

Our impact:

Working with fellow UK local authority associations, COSLA agreed the following: The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; it can prevent elected members from representing the communities they serve, prevent individuals from standing for election and undermine public trust in democratic processes. These harmful behaviours, whether occurring towards, between or by elected members are entirely unacceptable. Across our four nations COSLA, LGA, NILGA and WLGA commit to promoting Civility in Public Life, positive debate and resultantly supporting the wellbeing of our elected members.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the impact of Covid-19 on our BME communities re-emphasised the need to take an intersectional approach and the SIG revised its action plan in August to reflect this.

The SIG also continues to use its platform to raise the profile of female elected members, actively championing diversity in elected office and contributing to the development of national policy. In recent months this has included contributing to online parliament project sessions and hosting a 'wee circle' on Gender Architecture for the First Ministers' Council for Women and Girls.

How we achieved it:

This work is driven by the SIG, a nominated cross-party group, in accordance with the 'Achieving Gender Equality in Local Government Politics Action Plan', to ensure that efforts to promote equality and diversity in local democracy receive COSLAs full attention and are actively driven forward. The group considers and provides leadership on the issues of equality and diversity in Local Government, identifying and influencing changes in policy and practice to increase participation of under-represented groups.

Going forward:

With ongoing oversight and political leadership from the BEO SIG, work on the action plan will continue in the year ahead.

Gypsy/Travellers

Our impact:

In response to the public health crisis, COSLA worked with partners to rapidly organise access to sanitation in areas where local authorities were struggling to provide services because of lockdown restrictions. We co-authored a Covid-19 framework for local authority decision-making and supported councils to develop policies that could reduce the risk of virus spread on sites and camps as well as increase access to food and financial support. As restrictions have eased, we have continued to deliver against the ambitions of the

national action plan, formally launching a national pilot of the 'negotiated stopping' model with councils across Scotland and hosting an interactive workshop on delivering site improvements with meaningful participation of Gypsy/Traveller residents. Following publication of the Programme for Government we have also worked to understand the funding models needed to deliver COSLA Leaders' commitments to 'more and better culturally appropriate accommodation' over the next five-year period.

How we achieved it:

We supported the development of a multiagency 'Impact' group consisting of advocates, activists and members of Gypsy/Traveller communities, alongside Scottish Government, and health colleagues. We strengthened relationships between Government and our partners to better understand how Covid-19 was impacting Gypsy/Traveller communities and to identify additional support needed to keep them safe during the pandemic. We supported the development of new inclusive communications resources, which were launched on social media and additionally formed a local authority working group to ensure that information was being shared regularly across Local Government. Through the work of Leaders and our Boards we supported political leadership on the right to access safe sanitation and ensured that frontline experience from local authorities was informing national decision-making.

Going forward:

We will continue our work to support Gypsy/Travellers through the public health crisis and will be helping local authorities to make progress on spending capital investment funds provided by the Scottish Government for immediate site improvements. We will prioritise work to design and deliver new funding models that can deliver an affordable supply of Gypsy/Traveller sites and launch work that has been paused during the crisis to build a 'Local Leaders' network for elected members. Our Policy and Participation Officer will be helping councils to support meaningful participation and engagement of Gypsy/Travellers in local decision-making. We will be encouraging more councils to join our 'negotiated stopping' pilot and commissioning research to understand the impact of these methods on Gypsy/Travellers experiences, public health and equalities outcomes as well as on council resources.

Migrants Rights and Entitlements

Our impact:

We responded rapidly to the public health crisis by providing a Covid-19 framework for supporting local decision-making. This has assisted councils to understand their legal duties towards people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) during the pandemic and set out considerations for meeting the needs of people at risk of rough sleeping as well as vulnerable adults and children. We convened a national Consortium of third sector partners to monitor the needs of migrants and asylum seekers and have been working in partnership with the Scottish Government and third sector organisations to develop our recovery plans and strengthen access to housing and financial support. A key achievement has been the work local authorities are currently undertaking to make the Social Isolation Support Grant accessible to people with NRPF on low incomes so that they can safely self-isolate.

How we achieved it:

We worked with local authorities to capture the pressure and challenges observed by frontline workers to test and develop effective guidance; we worked with partners including

homelessness, legal and asylum charities to strengthen understanding of the needs of people with NRPF; and we also used our collective voice as Local Government associations across the UK to press the UK Government to change its policy and extend support for people with insecure immigration status.

Going forward:

We are resuming with urgency to our work to develop an anti-destitution strategy with Scottish Government and will be leading partnerships to strengthen access to housing and financial support for children and vulnerable adults as well as supporting work to pilot innovative homelessness pathways for those who are typically restricted from local authority support. We will continue to build powerful lobbies for change across the UK to amplify our calls for the NRPF rules to be lifted, particularly for the most vulnerable people and we will seek to develop the funding models necessary to deliver a stronger devolved safety net.

National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership:

The National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership was established in October 2019 to progress the recommendations from the First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership. The impact of the proposed Bill on Local Government and the wider public sector will be very significant. The Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing is a member of the Taskforce.

The work of the Taskforce was interrupted by the pandemic, but work is underway again. The Taskforce is hosting a number of Roundtables and has established a Public Sector Reference Group to inform the recommendations which will shape the draft Bill. The Taskforce has also been asked to consider whether this can and should be an opportunity to consider the incorporate of other treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Humanitarian Protection:

COSLA has supported Scottish Local Government in leading the way on humanitarian protection. Scottish local authorities have resettled over 3,500 refugees across all 32 councils through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and are now preparing to participate in the new Global Resettlement Programme. This was due to commence in 2020 but has been put on hold as a result of the pandemic and we are currently seeking clarity from UK Government as to when they intend to restart their resettlement work.

COSLA, working closely with council officers, not only 'matches' refugees to placements, but also provides ongoing advice, support and forums for local authority staff working with refugees. Local authorities are also playing their part in resettling Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), some of the most vulnerable people seeking asylum in the UK. In addition, COSLA works closely with the Home Office to ensure that the best interests of Scottish local authorities are reflected in resettlement, UASC and asylum policy development.

Human Trafficking:

On Anti-Slavery Day last year, COSLA launched new guidance for local authorities on how to combat human trafficking in their areas. Human trafficking cases have been found in all 32 local authorities in Scotland. It includes labour and sexual exploitation, and affects men, women and children. The guidance gives both frontline officers and managers advice on how to spot the signs of trafficking, and how to respond to ensure victims get the care and support they need. It is hoped that the guidance will better enable councils to stamp out this dreadful crime.

Additional guidance has been developed for First Responders, the council officers who come into contact with victims of trafficking, to ensure they have effective tools to trigger the right support for victims and have an understanding of the systems in place to help them.

The situation caused by the pandemic – a large-scale lockdown, significant pressures on public services and a looming unemployment crisis – mean many of the most vulnerable are even more at risk from trafficking and exploitation. COSLA has been working closely with colleagues in councils, Police Scotland and the Scottish Government to coordinate action. This includes specific work focussing on child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation and ‘county lines’ drug trafficking.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Working with councils 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

The impact of COVID-19 in Education, childcare and children's services

Our impact:

When the COVID-19 pandemic required the closure of schools and childcare settings in March, Local Government moved quickly to arrange emergency support and childcare to support key workers and vulnerable children. Emergency hubs were established, and new ways found to deliver free meals to eligible children.

COSLA have supported Local Government in the recovery of education, childcare and children's services by:

- Representing Local Government in national discussions, this includes our CYP Spokesperson Cllr Stephen McCabe co-chairing the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group with the Deputy First Minister.
- Ensuring there was significant Local Government input into national public health guidance for education, childcare and children's services.
- Securing £80m of funding from the Scottish Government for additional teaching and support staff. Agreeing £20m to support costs associated with the logistics of safely re-opening schools, and the commitment for a further £30m following a joint Scottish Government and Local Government cost collection process.
- Securing funding for councils to provide free meals to eligible children across during school holiday periods.
- Agreeing £25m worth of funding and devices with the Scottish Government to tackle digital exclusion in children and young people.
- Negotiated legislative changes which gave greater flexibility in the timescales and format of school placing requests and associated appeals processes so that councils could concentrate resources on supporting children and young people.
- Championing the role and views of Local Government in the media and in evidence sessions with the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee.

In March we jointly agreed with the Scottish Government to pause the Early Learning and Childcare expansion noting the impact of the lockdown on local infrastructure. The legislative duty on councils to deliver 1140 Hours of ELC was removed and we negotiated greater flexibility in the use of deployment of ELC and education funding.

Working with partners, we have also supported the national Children and Families Leadership Group leading work on agreeing the appropriate arguments to support vulnerable children, including discussions on family support and the £4m Promise Partnership Fund following the Care Review.

How we achieved it:

Key to our successes has been the continued commitment to partnership working at a political and official level across Scottish Government and Local Government and our partners in the third sector. We make the most of the shared forums to advance our positions and ensured that key decisions are taken jointly.

Going forward:

In the months ahead we will continue to lead Local Government's national response to any further mitigations across education, childcare and children's services.

The pandemic has disrupted much of the work that the Children and Young People Board had identified as a strategic focus for the year ahead. As we move beyond the pandemic, we will prioritise work in our key areas of strategic focus:

- Improving Children's Educational Outcomes
- Supporting Looked After Children
- Protecting and Supporting Children and Families.

This will include agreeing joint approaches with the Scottish Government on the return to 1140 ELC expansion and the agreement on Education Reform; driving forward work following the Independent Care Review through the Promise and ensuring Local Government's voice is heard and represented throughout the development of significant pieces of legislation including the Redress for Survivors Bill as well as the Incorporation of the UNCRC.

Our Impact:

- Worked with Police Scotland and other child protection partners to pilot a new, trauma-informed approach to joint investigative interviewing of children and young people across six local authorities. We have established a National Governance Group which will support the national implementation of the model.
- Agreed the Learning Estate Strategy for Scotland's schools, colleges and universities. This strategy will unlock investment for Local Authorities and will place the whole learning estate at the heart of meeting the needs of Scotland's communities and adopting a more integrated approach.
- Agreed funding and shared principle so that local authorities could build on the support they provide by making counselling services available through schools for children and young people over the age of ten.
- Jointly chaired the Children and Young People Mental Health Programme Board and, through this work, ensured that Local Government is represented in the development of the Mental Health Transition Recovery Plan as well as discussions around fair and flexible funding for local provision.
- Secured £6m additional resources to support and expand the local Developing the Young Workforce infrastructure, including DYW Coordinators in secondary schools.
- Agreed £15m to increase frontline staff to support learners with additional support needs and a joint Action Plan with the Scottish Government outlining how we intend to support the recommendations of Angela Morgan's independent Review of Additional Support for Learning implementation.
- Worked with children and young people with experience of secure care to develop and new national standards for secure care.
- Worked closely with partners to mitigate disruption to the Children's Hearing System caused by suspension of face to face hearings and agreed a recovery plan for the months ahead.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE – Supporting Local Government and Integrated Joint Boards to address demographic and financial challenges, enabling communities to live healthy, independent lives, and promoting an outcomes and prevention culture

Health and Social Care Integration

Our impact:

COSLA has continued to drive forward the integration agenda and secured continued support for health and social care integration despite the significant challenges that exist, including the challenges presented by COVID-19. The Review of Progress with Integration detailed 25 proposals to bring about an increase in the pace and scale of integration, these were published in February 2019, and substantial progress was made against these.. COSLA had a key role in this progress and in ensuring continued recognition of the Local Government locus and contribution in respect of integration.

How we achieved it:

COSLA co-chaired the Ministerial Strategic Group (MSG) at a political level and the small 'Leadership Group' mandated by the MSG to drive forward and deliver on the Review proposals.

Through these channels and through working with a range of partners, COSLA has ensured that the voice of Local Government has been heard and ensuring local systems are empowered to deliver improvements across integration. The success of integration to date has been based on the consensual support it receives across the system and buy in from senior executives such as Local Authority Chief Executives and IJB Chief Officers. COSLA has a leading role in ensuring this.

Going forward:

The response to the pandemic meant that many of the areas identified for further work in the review were paused, however arguably the integration agenda has moved forwards at pace throughout 2020. An independent review of social care was announced in the Programme for Government in September 2020. This review will report in January 2021 and through strong ongoing engagement with our members, COSLA will ensure that the Local Government voice is represented.

Public Health Reform

Our Impact:

As joint delivery partners of the Public Health Reform programme in Scotland we have made progress in the achievement of each of the three areas of the reform programme. We committed to deliver the vision for public health reform and we have:

- agreed and published public health priorities for Scotland.
- established Public Health Scotland, the new national public health body for Scotland, on 1st April 2020; and
- recruited COSLA nominations to the Board of Public Health Scotland, providing a strong Local Government voice in shaping the future direction of the organisation
- established and developed our unique joint sponsorship role with Scottish Government of Public Health Scotland, strengthening governance and accountability and informing the organisations strategic direction
- supported diverse ways of working to develop a whole system approach to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

Public Health Scotland (PHS) launched on the 1st of April 2020 as Scotland's new public health body, uniting the national public health functions in one place and focusing on how it can support national and local efforts to protect and improve the nation's health. It is the first public body jointly accountable to Scottish National and Local Government. This is a unique achievement secured by COSLA.

From the outset, PHS has sought to be a collaborative effort. This approach was affirmed during the legislative consultation, in 2019, which garnered 150 responses from across the national third and public sector. The breadth of comments reflected a collective ambition for PHS to be a collaborative body that works extensively with partners to help tackle local issues, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

We secured two COSLA nominated positions to the Board which will cement the importance of Local Government being at the heart of Public Health Scotland. The Public Health Priorities will continue to provide focus and direction for COSLA policy work in encouraging collaboration and testing the Whole System Approach, particularly in supporting Local Government. Through the joint Governance and Sponsorship arrangements for Public Health Scotland, we can ensure that the partnership with Local Government to improve public health outcomes underpins the work of Public Health Scotland.

How we achieved it:

The progress we've made in the joint programme of reform is testament to the positive and productive joint nature of the reform of public health. The partnership between National and Local Government has enabled us to make considerable progress across all three areas reform deliverables.

We have secured joint political decision making in all areas and have achieved a number of 'firsts' in developing this approach to a National reform programme and the setting up of a new public body. In partnership with Public Health Scotland, we have embedded a Public Health policy role in COSLA to support our ambitions for Local Government, working across policy portfolios and teams to strengthen collaboration between Public Health and Local Government.

Going forward:

We will continue to work with the Scottish Government to continue work to progress the programme of reform. We will continue to progress our joint sponsor arrangements and develop our role as an organisation. In doing so, ensure that COSLA nominations to the Board of Public Health Scotland have impact and influence through developing their leadership role in strengthening the relationship between Public Health and Local Government.

We will support closer integration and collaboration in the use of data and intelligence to improve decision making and outcomes for communities across the social determinants of health.

We will model collaboration nationally and locally on our shared priorities by working across COSLA's policy teams and Local Government to put wellbeing at the heart of sustainable and inclusive economic growth, embedding prevention in our approach to mental health and wellbeing, the reform of health and social care services and accelerating our work to tackle poverty, inequality and support for our most vulnerable communities including those with Multiple Complex Needs.

Other key achievements:

- The Reform of Adult Social Care Programme has been launched with COSLA and SG providing joint political oversight. The reform programme identified a number of areas for further work that the independent review will build on. A number of the identified areas of work such as Fair Work in social care and self-directed support will continue to progress.
- Scotland's first national Integrated Workforce Plan for Health and Social Care was published in December 2019 by Scottish Government and COSLA, alongside guidance for local integrated workforce plans. A subsequent Integrated Workforce Plan is currently in development, building on the lessons learned from this work. Research on the labour markets for social care was published jointly between COSLA and Scottish Government in early 2020. Substantial progress was also made on a wider programme to address workforce issues, including a campaign to promote social care as a meaningful, valued and rewarding career choice, helping to ensure that current and future service demand levels can be met.
- In addition to the Children and young people's MHWB programme board, COSLA contribute to wider mental health work through their role in the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group and in particular the delivery of actions 1 & 10 of the national suicide prevention action plan. The Covid pandemic has also put a greater focus on mental health and COSLA will continue to work with SG on the delivery of the MH Transition and Recovery Plan.
- COSLA, working alongside the Scottish Government and partners, is working to refresh Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy in response to the changing context and advancements that have been made in recent months. COSLA, working with Local Government partners, such as the Local Government Digital Office and the Improvement Service, has also played a central role in the increased use of technology in health and social care settings in response to Covid-19. This has included, but is not limited to, representing a key partner in the roll out of Near Me video consultation, supporting work aimed at assisting with the digital capabilities of care homes and working to develop programmes aimed at tackling digital exclusion.
- COSLA and Scottish Government published a refreshed implementation plan for the Keys to Life Learning Disability Strategy which has a greater focus on the

whole life journey, expressed under the headings of: living, learning, working and wellbeing. COSLA Officers are co-Chairs with Scottish Government of the Keys to Life Leadership Group which is working to aid the implementation of the report's recommendations.

STRONG, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES - Tackling poverty and inequalities, protecting the vulnerable, and strengthening communities and improving their safety and sustainability

Social Renewal Advisory Board:

The Social Renewal Advisory Board was established in June 2020 by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People. The Board aims to build on the shifts in policy and practice that have been seen as a result of working across portfolios and in partnership with frontline service deliverers in Local Government, the third sector and communities. It focuses on reducing poverty and disadvantage, embedding a human-rights based approach and advancing equality. COSLA is represented on the Board by President, Cllr Alison Evison, and Cllr Elena Whitham and on each of the nine Policy Circles by COSLA officers. The Board aims to publish its final report and recommendations in December 2020. COSLA will seek to influence those recommendations.

Sports, Arts and Culture:

As a result of Covid-19 and the impacts on and implications for the Sport, Arts and Culture sectors, COSLA has established two national working groups. Both seek to address, discuss and find solutions for the challenges facing the Sport and Leisure and the Arts and Culture sectors. Establishing these new working groups has allowed us to forge new and productive relationships with national organisations which will ensure we continue to collaborate on solutions for two sectors who continue to be deeply affected by Covid-19 restrictions.

Housing and Homelessness:

The Local Government Housing Resilience Group, chaired by COSLA officers, was established to identify and respond to the key issues and challenges facing the local authority housing sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chair meets fortnightly with the chairs of the Social Housing and Private Rented Sector Resilience Groups, the Minister for Housing and COSLA Community Wellbeing spokesperson to facilitate a coordinated response across the sector.

COSLA, alongside the Resilience Groups, has worked to develop coherent approaches to a number of issues including voids processing, guidance for the housing sector, landlords and tenants, and responding to the impact of the emergency legislation on the housing sector and evictions process for landlords. Of particular note, COSLA and sector partners raised concerns regarding the notice period for evictions due to anti-social behaviour being three months, rather than the standard 28 days. A preference to retain the 28-day notice period was explained and this was amended from 3 October, so that evictions on grounds relating to anti-social behaviour and criminality, was amended from three months to 28 days' notice across all private and social tenancies.

Through the resilience groups, COSLA and Scottish Government are working closely to respond to issues raised regarding issues with accessibility of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). Conversations are ongoing on a range of areas including issues relating to managing a single fund for multiple purposes, challenges in the move to Universal Credit, and how local authorities and partners continue to support the most vulnerable in our communities to maintain their tenancies.

COSLA and Scottish Government jointly published the updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, in response to the reconvened Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) recommendations which took into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COSLA and Public Health Scotland have committed to a programme of joint work to support the development of evidence-based policy and practice in response to the housing, health and social care content of the newly revised Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. This collaborative approach will feed in research findings, recent improvement, innovation and the experiences to inform the development of a national homelessness prevention programme. The programme will adopt a right's based and inclusive approach to developing policy and improving practice with a focus on those most marginalised, described by the Hard Edges Scotland report 2019 as being 'multiply disadvantaged'.

In April 2020, a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI 2020/139) was laid in Parliament which brought forward the previously agreed date of May 2021 to 5 May 2020, upon which the Unsuitable Accommodation Order would be applied to all homeless households. Two exemptions are in place to ensure physical distancing until 31 January 2021. A group was established jointly hosted by COSLA and the Scottish Government to share good practice to inform guidance. COSLA, ALACHO and local authority officers noted that the SSI Order did not adequately extend equalities protections to vulnerable groups, these concerns were also raised by third sector partners including Women's Aid, Shelter and Crisis. Through joint working, this will now be addressed in an amendment to be laid in parliament in November 2020.

Justice - Emergency Early Prisoner Release:

COSLA officers, with the support of SOLACE, SWS and ALACHO advisers, were instrumental in calling together various partners i.e. the Scottish Govt, Community Justice Scotland and SPS Officials as part of a co-ordinating group to plan, prepare and monitor the emergency early release of prisoners from April to June.

Accompanying regulations laid in Parliament in May as part of the COVID 19 response excluded anyone serving a prison sentence for a COVID 19 related offence, or who had been imprisoned for domestic abuse from the emergency early release. The latter was welcomed by COSLA given our lobbying of the Scottish Government on this matter.

Overall, the implementation of the early release of prisoner's programme went smoothly and helped bring down the prison population down to 6,869 to allow single cell occupancy across most of the prison estate, in line with public health guidelines.

Recovery of the Justice System Programme:

COSLA continues to engage with the Scottish Government's Covid 19 Justice Hub on this work, as well as on the Scottish Government's Recovery of the Justice System Group, as part of the RRT Programme that covers issues such as the increasing prison population, unpaid work, remand, bail and use of warrants. In October 2020 COSLA secured the agreement of the Scottish Government to have joint political oversight of the RRT Programme's Community Justice Group by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson.

Policing:

COSLA on behalf of member councils secured representation on the Scottish Police Authority's (SPA) Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to provide feedback on Police Scotland's response to the Covid 19 pandemic, along with representation on the SPA's Policing and Performance Committee to promote better joint scrutiny with the SPA.

The Police Scrutiny Conveners Forum meetings arranged by COSLA have led work on local and national policing and community safety matters, including governance, Covid 19 response, local policing programme, Violence against Women and Girls, Brexit and COP26. COSLA recently secured agreement from Police Scotland to participate in COSLA's Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Working Group.

COSLA has recently managed to fully resolve a significant matter that arose between Local Government and Police Scotland on Temporary Traffic Restriction Orders (TTROs) a couple of years ago. This occurred after Police Scotland announced it would be stepping back from its role in TTROs, creating cost pressures on local authorities. As a result, a number of our members considered court action against Police Scotland. Not resolving this could have posed a serious risk to public safety and the organisation of local events across the country. The TTROs Tripartite Group chaired by COSLA reached a consensual position with Police Scotland on TTROs following a hiatus on this work caused by the COVID 19 lockdown. A Joint Position Statement document was produced on a collaborative basis in October 2020 to inform a future approach. This will be available in November 2020 for circulation to all local authorities.

Stadia Safety:

In 2018 there were concerns about an independently commissioned police report that felt the current arrangements on safety certification and Safety Advisory Groups for Scotland's football stadia were inadequate and therefore unsafe. COSLA officials have worked with councils and other key partners e.g. Police Scotland and the Scottish Government through our National Working Group on Football Stadium Safety. As a result, the potential for creating additional duties on Local Government in this area has receded with Local Government's improvement work being commenced in August 2020 by the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) to help support local authorities.

The provision of this support and assistance to local authorities by the SGSA is jointly overseen by COSLA and Scottish Government. As part of this support from the SGSA, COSLA have also secured the provision of regular updates and advice on COVID 19 responses on stadia safety that have been circulated to councils.

Appropriate Adult Services:

The introduction of National Appropriate Adult Co-ordinator hosted by COSLA, in September has been a positive step towards the promotion of an outcomes focused and human rights-based approach in Appropriate Adult services.

Participatory Budgeting:

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the progress made across Scottish local authorities towards mainstream participatory budgeting and the realisation of the 1% Framework Agreement. However, local authorities and communities found new and innovative ways to work in partnership to meet local need which has strengthened relationships and cemented the need for people and communities to be involved in priority setting and decision making. The COSLA PB Team continue to work with local authorities, Scottish Government and partner organisations to support and develop plans for mainstream PB t whilst recognising the challenges facing our communities and local authorities.

COSLA continues to work in partnership with local authorities, the Improvement Service and the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government on the delivery and development of Consul – the digital platform for open and transparent citizen engagement and participation. Given that Covid-19 has halted the ability to engage face-to-face with communities CONSUL is being used as a digital tool to engage with people and communities about a wide range of issues from the impacts of Covid-19 on young people, to consultation on housing strategies and on mainstream participatory budgeting. The coming year will also see developments on an artificial intelligence project, funded by NESTA and in partnership with the Alan Turing Institute at the University of Warwick.

Welfare and Social Security:

Scottish Welfare Fund:

COSLA has worked with Local Government and Scottish Government to oversee the distribution and allocation of an additional £45m/£20m to the SWF to address poverty and hardship resulting from the pandemic.

COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government and Local Government to develop and deliver on the Self-Isolation Support Grant which provides a one-off payment of £500 to those asked to self-isolate by Test and Protect. These payments are available to those in receipt of UC/Legacy benefits or those on a low income. Joint work across COSLA also ensured that this support would be available to those with NRPF.

Employability:

COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government and Local Government to enhance employability support for those affected by the economic downturn and pandemic through £100m of funding for employability measures including; Young Person Guarantee (£60m), funding to enhance support for those made redundant (£5m), a Transition Training Fund (£25m) and the doubling of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (from £10m to £20m) for business. Half of the funding for the Guarantee will be directed through Local Government for spend in 2020/21 to ensure flexible locally tailored responses.

COSLA continues to work closely with SLAED, SOLACE, SG and partners on the No One Left Behind commitment for Scotland's employability services via the formal delivery plan. Key strands of that work include re-purposing of existing programmes and funding from April 2021, the development of a single Shared Measurement Framework, an accompanying Communications Strategy and national governance arrangements. These changes will signal more responsibility and resource for local authorities to lead on employability work at a local level with an expectation of a whole system / person approach that benefits from close working with other Local Government services and local partners, including the third sector.

COSLA continues to work closely with DWP and Scottish Government on the UK Kickstarter scheme to support young people.

Equally Safe:

COSLA Group Leaders identified at the outset of the emergency that women and children living with perpetrators of domestic abuse under lockdown, along with women engaged in commercial sexual exploitation and prostitution were increasingly vulnerable as a result of the pandemic. COSLA and Equally Safe partners have developed guidance for local authorities and community planning partners on support women and children at risk.

COSLA has also supported a range of partners develop resources to support practitioners in a range of setting respond to domestic violence including in an education setting, during Scotland's route map to recovery; domestic abuse awareness raising tool and IS briefing on supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

COSLA and the Scottish Government have agreed to work in partnership on a Covid-19 facing Commercial Sexual Exploitation Action Plan. As part of this COSLA will work with Encompass Network, VAWP's, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service to explore how flexible models of support can be developed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure that systems and services better recognise and respond to the needs of women, children and young people in the future. COSLA and Scottish Government published joint supplementary national violence against women guidance to reflect this. This guidance provides officers and decision makers with a framework to understand the wide range of work ongoing to ensure the safety and wellbeing needs of women and children are supported at this time.

EFFECTIVE SHARED SERVICES – Continuously improving the myjobscotland, Trading Standards Scotland and Business Gateway services we provide directly for councils and their partners

Supporting the Local Government Business Gateway Network:

Our Impact:

Employee wellbeing is high on Local Government's agenda as the Covid-19 crisis has created a need for remote working. The workload has been significant and incredibly intensive, and this combination of factors means that the working environment is potentially more stressful. With that in mind the National Unit has supported the wider Local Government Business Gateway network through regular online meetings to allow people to share experiences, ideas and to ensure that there is a mutual support network.

How we achieved it:

Initially, through March to June, we organised daily calls with the network. This was at the point where many were involved in delivering the funding support. This gave everyone a forum to share knowledge and good practice, check understanding and support each other. Over time, and as the environment settled down, the frequency of these meetings reduced to one per fortnight.

Going forward:

As new programmes arise, such as the most recent lockdown support, the frequency of meetings is being increased to ensure that mutual support is there.

Trading Standards Scotland:

Trading Standards Scotland (TSS) is the national team for trading standards in Scotland. Funded by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury, it is managed by COSLA, with political governance provided through the TSS Governance Board. TSS coordinates work on national priorities and investigates cross boundary and national casework. It also delivers specialist illegal money lending and ecrime functions, as well as managing the national intelligence database and conducting analysis of that data. An integral part of COSLA, TSS works closely with partners including the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards Scotland (SCOTSS), Police Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland and UK and Scottish Governments to strengthen protection for Scottish consumers.

Priorities for the team in 2020/21 include misleading energy efficiency marketing, the illicit trade in puppies, illicit internet protocol TV and sales of counterfeit goods on social media sites.

In March as a result of the restrictions introduced to tackle the Covid19 pandemic TSS shifted focus towards preventative messaging to consumers on Covid related consumer issues. A weekly bulletin is now issued outlining information on the latest scams and how to avoid them and report them. As restrictions eased the information in the bulletin has been expanded to cover more traditional consumer issues as these are once again on the rise.

As restrictions eased towards the end of the summer work recommenced on the national priorities identified in the business plan. Project Maxwell which aims to tackle misleading

internet advertising in relation to retrofit energy efficiency measures in the home is underway and has resulted in a number of websites and social media pages being removed. A comprehensive consumer awareness campaign has also been devised including the first TSS podcast. The team have also recently taken enforcement action which resulted in the significant disruption of illicit internet protocol TV with thousands of end users losing access to the illicit streams. A case will now be reported to the Procurator Fiscal and significant financial investigations are ongoing.

myjobscotland:

Our Impact:

2019/20 was a busy year for the staff in the myjobscotland team, who oversaw many significant changes to our technology stack, including: server migration, upgrading of the content management platform for the first time since 2008, and the delivery of a whole new application process for candidates - all in the period of 12 short months.

The implementation of the new application component was completed in December 2019 following a short period of down time. It was only with significant support from Councils that testing was completed quicker than anticipated, meaning publication of jobs was able to begin two weeks earlier than originally planned, and in advance of Christmas.

The new component is directly supported by the supplier meaning that the flow of new functionality can be rolled out quicker to all users, whether they be Councils, organisations or candidates.

In November 2019, Leaders approved the creation of a strategic governance board for myjobscotland.

COSLA Central Services:

Delivering professional operational management to support COSLA to deliver for its members.

Our impact:

We have created a Central Services team that integrates COSLA's invisible 'back office' functions to achieve greater business resilience and accountability for the resources we use to deliver for our members.

Central Services looks after our people, our finances, our data & ICT, our buildings and facilities, not to mention support for our political governance arrangements.

In 2019-20 and the first half of 2020-21 Central Services has:

- Implemented a Trade Union recognition agreement.
- Carried out and implemented a review of our ICT provision.
- Quickly adapted to run large political governance meetings remotely in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We doubled the number of meetings we serviced between March and July to keep timely political governance at the heart of COSLA's work during the fast-paced Covid-related developments.
- Facilitated remote working for all staff since the outbreak of the pandemic.
- Carried out two staff surveys to inform how we support employees during the pandemic.
- Reviewed finances to mitigate loss of income from the Conference Centre.
- Augmented our cyber security arrangements.
- Trained and appointed Mental Health First Aiders, provided all managers with training in 'Mentally Health Workplaces', and created a 'well-being portal' on our intranet to support our employees.

Going forward:

We will continue to improve our partnering approach with the rest of the organisation to ensure operational management supports progress towards COSLA's goals.

We will explore opportunities to deliver Central Services in co-operation with partners such as the Improvement Service to achieve greater resilience, closer working relationships and best value.

Media and Communications:

Over the last year, COSLA has continued to apply a real, meaningful and determined effort to improving our communication both with our Membership in an effort to get Local Government's voice and messages across, particularly in relation to the heroic response of Councils to the Covid Pandemic and the essential services we continue to provide every day.

Our impact:

- Another essential services campaign, titled 'Invest in Essential Services', around this year's Spending Review took place. This was probably our most successful Spending Review campaign in terms of traction, as it was widely quoted in both the media and Parliament. A similar campaign will be undertaken this year building on the success of Essential Services Branding.
- The COSLA Communications and Membership work has been revised and restructured in response to the pandemic. Our Inside COSLA has been replaced with a weekly Elected Members Briefing offering key messages and strategic updates for every single elected member in Scotland.
- Over the Summer period, we undertook two campaigns #CouncilsCare and then #CouncilsAct on a phased basis around the work Councils were doing in relation to making sure that our Communities were supported during the Covid Pandemic and thereafter as we emerged from phase one.
- This was accompanied by a weekly infographic prepared in partnership with the IS. Showing the heroic response of Councils and their workforce in delivering to Communities
- Relaunch of the COSLA website with a stand- alone Covid-19 section
- In partnership with our Colleagues in the Improvement Service – a CovidKhub was established.
- Graphics updated and enhanced – more picture less words, links used more
- A large increase in videos to boost visibility of the Presidential Team and our Spokespeople
- Two Standalone longer videos in relation to firstly the heroic work of Councils and secondly the impact of the Pandemic on Mental Health were done in conjunction with our Trade Union Colleagues.
- Improved accessibility of all our content – introducing subtitles.
- We remain in discussions with STV about a Hidden Heroes type piece on the workforce.
- As we moved from phase one to the recovery phase the COSLA Blueprint was launched and accompanied by a new logo, a stakeholder's toolkit an #essentialeveryday hashtag and a twibbon. It was also accompanied by a range of themed weeks on a different element of Policy.
- Vice President Councillor Graham Houston gave a full half hour Conference speech on the roll out of the Blueprint at this year's Holyrood Politics Explained Conference.
- The President has undertaken a series of long read sit down interviews with respected publications including the Economist and Holyrood Magazine
- Our non Covid work has seen us move into the world of the podcast with a COSLA in Conversation – on the European Charter of Local Self Government Bill.
- We continue the process of re-engaging with Council Communication Teams across Scotland

- We have produced detailed briefings on a range of subjects from Brexit to our work representing Local Government in Europe for both our own Elected Members as well as for Parliamentarians.

Facts and Figures

Twitter

- Approaching 16,000 followers – up 2,000 in last year
- 3.9m impressions (up 2.5m)
- 26.8k engagements (likes, link clicks & retweets) – up 15.1k
- Top tweet (impressions) – Announcement of new national helpline on 14 April (157.6k)
- Top tweet (engagements) – Launch of 'A Day in the Life of Scotland's Councils' video on 26 June (2.7k engagements)

Facebook

- 1,097 fans
- 1,371 followers
- 8.2k engagements
- Most liked/shared post: Opening of household waste recycling centres on 15 May

Videos

- A Day in the Life of Scotland's Councils: 4,240 views (short extracts from video posted in August had 6.8k views on social media)
- Don't Stay on Mute: 2,550 views
All video views (FB): 10.8k
- All video views (Twitter): 28.5k

2020 was supposed to be a period of consolidation after a busy year of updating the main website on AWS, as well as the underlying platform that supported candidate interactions. That all changed in March 2020.

Not only was this the first month that the Governance Board met for the first time, but by the end of the month, we were looking at the many ways we could support Councils and potential candidates through this difficult period. Initial discussions were held with NHS and Scottish Government with the idea that myjobscotland could be used to attract volunteers to help during the pandemic, however this was stood down after it was felt that local partnerships were better placed to reach out and deliver this aspect - that said we were agile enough to have something ready at short notice if needed.

A growing concern from day one of lockdown from Councils, was the inability to carry out face-to-face interviews with candidates who had been shortlisted for existing vacancies. Whilst many relied on Teams and Zoom calls, we had an opportunity to trial embedded video questions within our new application form, and after negotiating good terms for an initial trial we had 11 Councils take part. Feedback from Councils and Candidates has been so good that with the agreement of our Board, we will now offer a full year of this service to Councils at no extra cost from the start of November 2020. This will be funded through our commercial activities not the annual levy.

The project was also recognised for its success winning a Cornerstone RAVE Award in the

Reinventing Recruitment category, our first truly worldwide award.

Going Forward:

Following the downturn during lockdown, job postings are now increasing back to normal levels. There has been an 18% increase in application numbers, likely down to job losses during COVID19. In June myjobscotland received 47,689 applications. The highest number of applications received in 18 months.

myjobscotland continues to provide a candidate satisfaction level of 84% against 1.1m registered users as well as maintaining and developing business procedures for our members.

Our close working partnership with the Cornerstone Customer Success team has also helped us to develop a working roadmap which we hope will allow us to deliver further efficiencies and individual requests from members.

Facts and Figures:

In 2020

5,910 Candidates Supported (+28% increase from last year)

1.1M Candidates registered since 2015 (+12% increase from last year)

16.4M site visits (sessions) (+6% increase from last year)

5,979 Council support tickets responded to

£23 advertise / manage / recruit / support (90% lower than commercial sites)

573 external organisations advertising with us (with a further 203 Childcare providers funded by Scottish Gov)

37.7m job searches

57% organic traffic / brand is known and easily found on search engines

myjobscotland Career Hub launched July 2020, showcasing career opportunities in Public Sector.