

THE COSLA PLAN

2017-22



Your local voice, nationally

Every day of the year, millions of people rely on the services that Local Government delivers.

From funding to housing, roads to early years, and social care to dealing with Brexit, COSLA's job is to champion councils' vital work and secure the resources and powers they need.

We're a politically led, cross-party organisation and this Plan sets out the vision and overall priorities that our members have set. It covers the next 5 years and its priorities will be reviewed annually. It's a crucial part of our governance, and drives everything that COSLA does.

The Plan itself covers a unique period for Scotland's councils. Demand is growing while resources are diminishing. Change is taking place in key areas like education, health and social care, and the economy, to name but a few. The debate about local democracy and community empowerment, which COSLA is proud to have helped put on the map, is beginning to take hold. At the same time, the UK's exit from the European Union is set to change Scotland's future, and the place of Local Government in it.

In challenging times, it's vital to work together to focus on what Local Government does best; transforming lives locally. This plan focuses on the key priorities facing councils and on the support that they need from us to achieve better outcomes across the country.

It also underpins COSLA's fundamental commitment to reform based on integrating public services locally, and to giving councils and communities a strong democratic voice. That requires a different way of working; joining up a range of public services to focus on what's needed locally, investing in prevention, building services around local circumstances and priorities, and empowering local democratic leaders and communities.

The good news is that Scotland is beginning this journey; the challenge is to unlock its full potential and make it the default way of working. Councils can't achieve that alone, and a major theme of this plan is the partnership with communities, governments, staff and trade unions, parliaments, and others that will be required.



We want to unite every council and every elected member in that task. To achieve that, COSLA itself is changing. Our transformation follows a comprehensive review of our practices, procedures and governance; we have already made good progress, and this plan summarises how we will continue to improve.

That's vital, because now more than ever before communities need strong, united Local Government, and our over-riding commitment is to build a member led organisation that focuses on its members, that delivers strong leadership, and that constantly addresses the opportunities and challenges facing councils and their local communities, now and in the future.

In other words, this plan doesn't just transform what we will do, but also how we will do it.

We look forward to making it happen.



The COSLA Plan: At a Glance

COSLA's Purpose	COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland. We provide political leadership and representation on national issues, and work on behalf of councils to strengthen local democracy and improve local services.				
COSLA's Vision for Local Government	“To make communities better and more equal places by empowering local decision making and enabling councils to do what works locally.”				
COSLA's Principles	Strengthening Local Democracy	Working Together Locally	Delivering Outcomes	Focusing on Communities	Defending Local Choices
COSLA's Priorities	LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING				
	UK EXIT FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION				
	DEMOCRACY AND REFORM				
	EDUCATION and CHILDREN'S SERVICES				
	HEALTH and SOCIAL CARE				
	LOCAL ECONOMIES and INCLUSIVE GROWTH				
	A UNITED VOICE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT				
	EFFECTIVE SHARED SERVICES				
COSLA's Values	Ambitious	Accountable	Positive	Focused	Proactive



About COSLA

COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland. We provide political leadership and representation on national issues, and work on behalf of councils to strengthen local democracy and improve local services.

Our job is to stand up for Local Government and represent it effectively. As a cross party organisation, we are led by our members, and focused on their priorities.

We work with Scottish, UK and international governments to help Scotland's councils improve lives locally, and to secure the resources and powers that councils need. We also directly deliver a network of specialist shared services for councils and their partners.

Working on behalf of our members, we:

Engage

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

Lead

LEAD reforms that improve public services and save money effectively

Develop

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

Negotiate

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

Campaign

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

Support

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

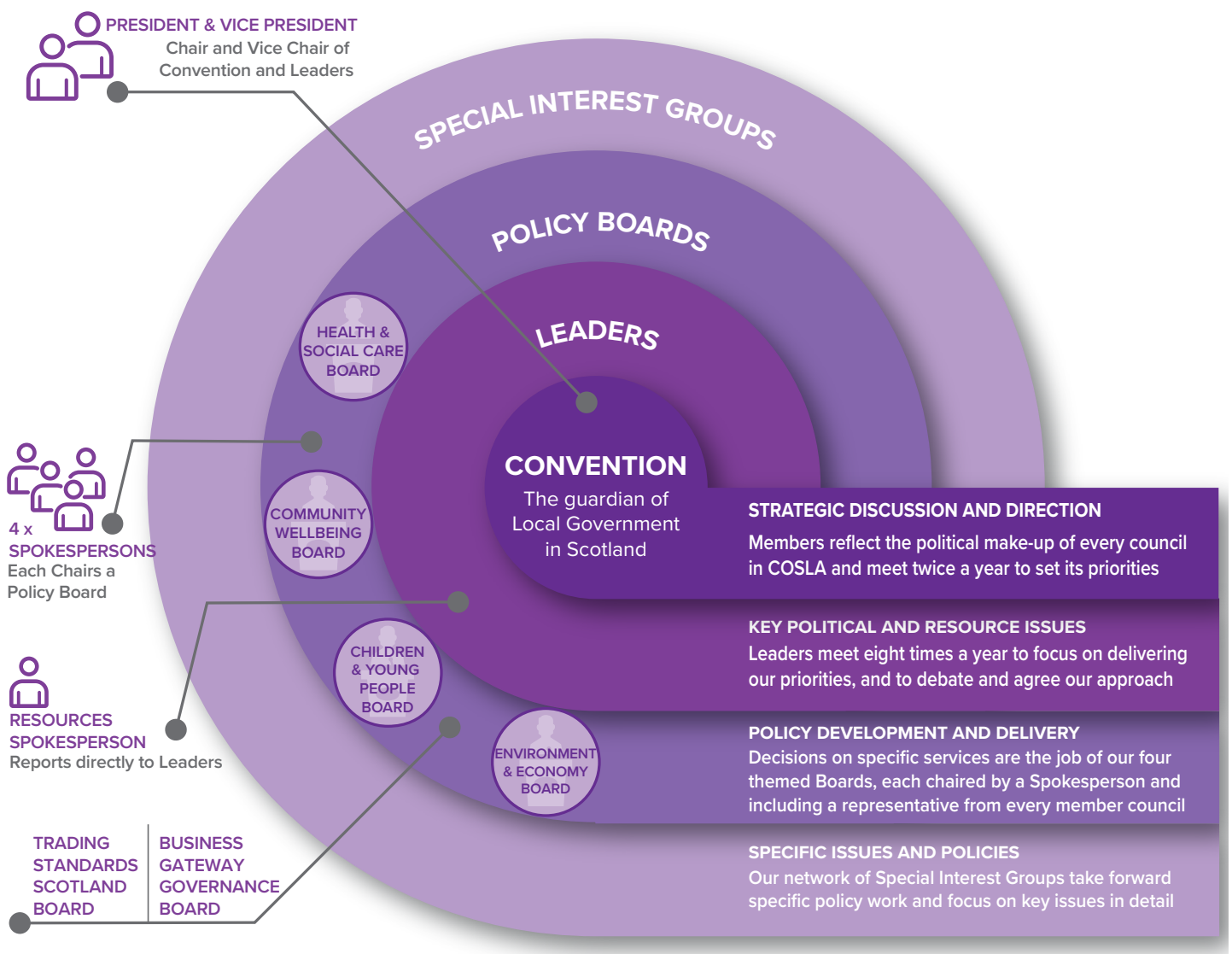
Champion

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

How We Work

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

Led by our President, Vice President, and 5 Spokespersons, our decisions are made in the following ways:





Our Vision for Local Government

This plan outlines COSLA's diverse work, but it is united by a strong shared vision.

That vision is to make communities better and more equal places by empowering local decision making and enabling councils to do what works locally.

We share this vision because the evidence tells us that it is the best way of getting things done. Approaches in our cities will not suit remote rural communities, just as the priorities in our towns will not be the same as those on our islands. And despite best efforts, 50 years of 'one size fits all' thinking hasn't reduced the inequalities that still affect too many parts of Scotland.

Instead, our vision can lead to real changes: more young people achieving their full potential, older people leading longer, better lives; good quality jobs; and healthier, safer, more sustainable, and more empowered communities.

Our Principles: What We Believe

Our vision is guided by five principles, which are enshrined in our Constitution:

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY	Taking decisions as close as possible to the people they affect.
WORKING TOGETHER LOCALLY	Joining up public services to get better results and greater efficiency in the places they serve.
DELIVERING OUTCOMES	Making a long term difference by focusing on impact not inputs, and by preventing problems before they arise.
FOCUSING ON COMMUNITIES	Building services around local priorities and circumstances, and being accountable to local people.
DEFENDING LOCAL CHOICES	Freeing up councils to reflect local circumstances and have flexibility over local decisions and resources.



Our Priorities

Our priorities set out the key activities that we will focus on to make our vision a reality over the year ahead. Each represents a ‘game changing’ area of work during 2017-18.

All of our priorities reflect the issues that members have identified. To develop them, we worked with Councillors throughout the country and from across all of COSLA’s political groups. Based on that work, we will focus on 8 key priorities in 2017/18:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING	Getting a fair deal for COSLA members on public spending priorities, and negotiating greater local financial freedoms and powers.
UK EXIT FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION	Securing a strong voice for Local Government throughout negotiations, achieving devolution of powers in the new landscape, and supporting councils to address change.
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.
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.
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.
LOCAL ECONOMIES and INCLUSIVE GROWTH	Building strong and sustainable communities by enabling councils to drive inclusive economic growth and investment in business support, economic development, skills and regeneration.
A UNITED VOICE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT	Strengthening and developing the way COSLA works by focusing on its members, communicating effectively, and championing key issues.
EFFECTIVE SHARED SERVICES	Continuously improving the myjobscotland, Trading Standards Scotland, and Business Gateway services we provide directly for councils and their partners.



However, these priorities are not intended to capture everything that we will do, or to be an exact blueprint for how we will go about delivering our work. That is rightly the role of the detailed plans that are taken forward by our Leaders Meeting and four Policy Boards. Our priorities will also be driven forward by our campaigns and media activities, in line with our Communications Strategy.

Our Approach

Scotland has a proud tradition of doing things locally. COSLA was established in 1975, but standing up for Scotland's local priorities goes back 800 years. We evolved from the Convention of Royal Burghs, once the oldest representative body in Europe. Today, we're part of what makes Scotland tick.

That's why as an organisation, we want the way in which we work to be as important as what we do.

In particular, we want every elected member to be able to shape our activities, benefit locally from the work that we do on their behalf, and to make it as easy as possible for them to engage with us and actively support our work.

Our values therefore guide our approach to decision making, communication, and how we will maintain and enhance our relationship with our member councils. We've listened to our members' feedback, and as an organisation, we will be:

AMBITIOUS: forward thinking and ambitious for Local Government and what it can achieve

ACCOUNTABLE: accountable to, and directed by, our decision-making structures

POSITIVE: working constructively with everyone interested in improving local outcomes

FOCUSED: clear about what we want to achieve, based on the needs of our members

PROACTIVE: constantly listening, communicating and improving

By putting these values at the heart of our approach, our goal is to help elected members address different local circumstances and priorities effectively, equip them to support their communities, and help new ideas to flourish.



Changing and Improving

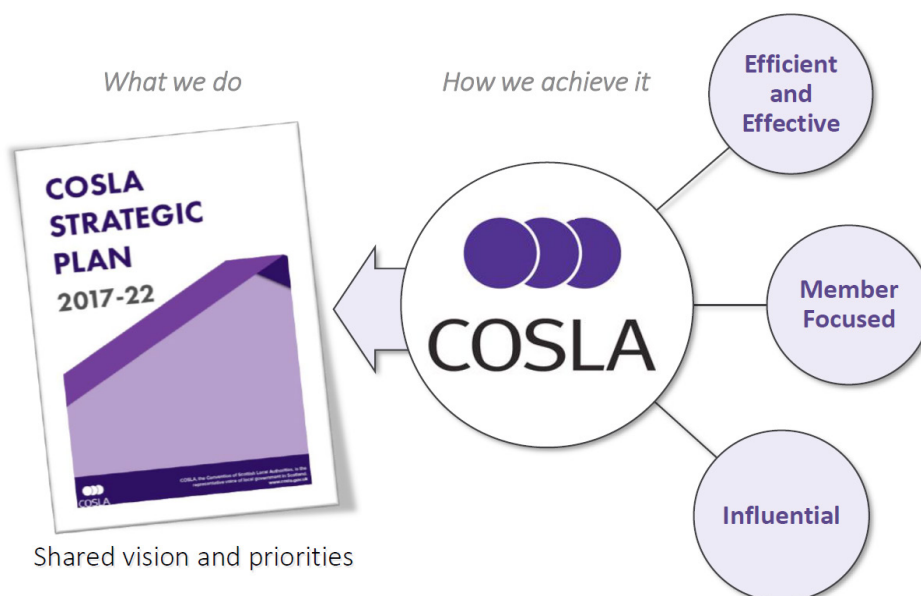
COSLA already has a record of lobbying for Local Government and providing key national services.

But just as Local Government is changing, so are we.

In March 2017 we completed a major strategic review of how we operate. Our goal is to fully implement the review's 28 recommendations, and strengthen our relationship with every local elected member, whether they're directly involved in our structures or not.

How are we going to do it?

This is about creating the organisation that our members have asked for, and rising to the challenges facing Scotland's councils. To achieve that, our overall objective is to ensure that COSLA is Efficient and Effective, Member Focused, and Influential.



Delivering this will mean building on key areas of strength, and increasing our impact in other areas. Everyone in COSLA has a part to play, and all of the details are set out in our full Transformation Plan- if you would like a copy please contact members@cosla.gov.uk.



When will this happen?

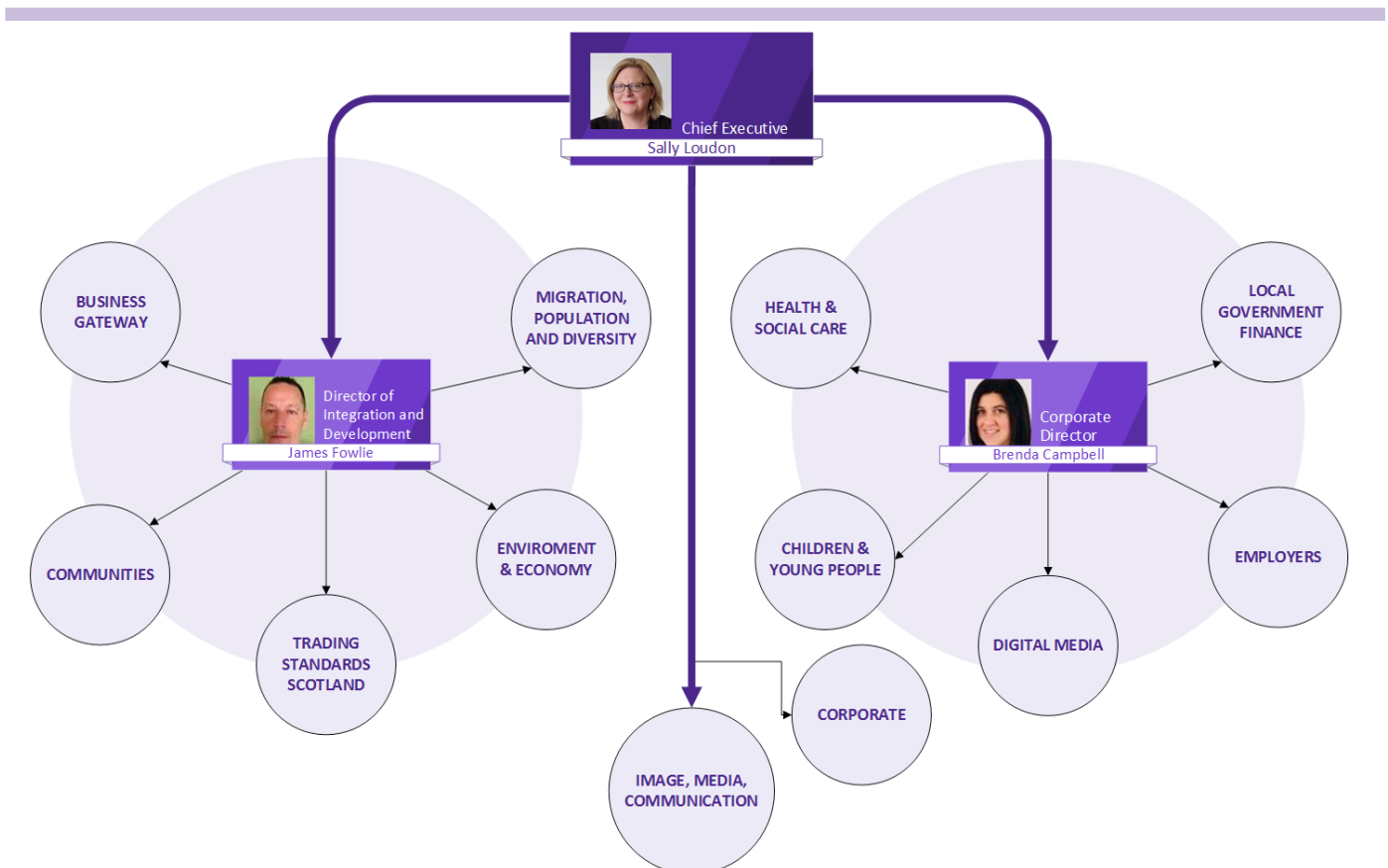
This Plan is one component of COSLA's wider improvement framework agreed as part of our Review. It will be supported by an updated work-plan for Leaders providing oversight of the work taking place in relation to our key priorities, and by work-plans for each of our Policy Boards.

It's also part of a series of wider changes and improvements including relevant changes to the COSLA Constitution, a new Communications Strategy and Action Plan, liaison arrangements with every council, and a range of other related improvements. The following table highlights the main improvements that we're focused on, and we'll monitor and report on our progress regularly.

What are we trying to achieve?	How are we going to do this?	How will we know we've been successful?
INFLUENTIAL		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Successful negotiations with governments, trade unions and others at all levels -A clear role in the governance of Scotland -Positive image and reputation for COSLA and councils -A clear role for COSLA in developing all relevant policy and legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Proactive policy development and lobbying around key priorities -Targeted Campaigns, Media Handling & PR -Effective use of evidence -Strong political and officer relationships -Engaging and mobilising support across Local Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We have influenced government policy on key issues -Our priorities have underpinned all of our lobbying activities -Local Government has a stronger media and public profile -Changes and reforms support local democratic choice and control
EFFECTIVE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consistently focused on the Vision and Values that members have set -Constantly evolving to address the issues facing councils and communities -A network of high quality national services supporting councils locally -Highly efficient and value for money services for councils and councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rolling out a new Performance Management and Planning framework -Staff and member development -Reviewing and improving our organisational structures -Always working with professional associations, Improvement Service and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Our performance framework shows that we are continuously improving -The COSLA Review and transformation plan has been fully delivered -All our work is joined up across the local government family -We continue to deliver value for money and improve our efficiency
MEMBER FOCUSED		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Better and more interactive decision making structures -Always tuned into local priorities and supporting Councillors locally -Regular 2 way engagement with all members -Clear and demonstrable COSLA membership benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Modernising our governance structures and processes -New COSLA Communication Strategy -Visible local COSLA leadership and liaison -Stronger focus on building relationships with councils and councillors -Listening and responding to feedback and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We've greatly increased interaction with members from across the country -Members support us and are satisfied with the work that we are doing -Members are effectively informed about, and benefit from, our activities

How We Are Organised

COSLA's powered by its thematic Policy Teams, which cover a wide range of issues, and underpin the work of our office bearers and decision making groups.



Each team supports councils and Councillors in a variety of ways, including:

- Building Local Government views at Scottish, UK and European levels
- Delivering consultations, guidance and evidence on key developments
- Enabling national budget and workforce negotiations on behalf of councils
- Supporting individual councils with local issues and priorities
- Developing lobbying and campaigns on key priorities
- Sharing new thinking and driving forward public service reforms

Of course, COSLA is not just about politics. Through our myjobscotland recruitment portal, Trading Standards Scotland service, and Business Gateway national unit, we help ensure that councils and many other parts of the public sector also have shared access to a range of national services, skills and capacity.



Find out more

COSLA is your national organisation, and we need your help to succeed.

We'll work hard to keep you informed and ensure that the issues you face are at the top of our agenda. And we want to make it as easy as possible for you to engage with us and actively support our work too. There are lots of ways to keep in touch:



WEBSITE

www.cosla.gov.uk: Our website has much more information about COSLA, and the issues we're working on.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on [Twitter](#) (@COSLA) or [Facebook](#) (CofSLA) for the latest news.



BULLETINS

Watch out for our regular bulletins.

FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS

Drop us a line at members@cosla.gov.uk or call 0131 474 9200.

DISCUSS

A liaison officer is assigned to each council and is always on hand to discuss the support that COSLA can provide.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Join us in October for the keynote event in the Scottish Local Government calendar.

VISIT

Our political meetings are generally hosted in our Edinburgh headquarters, which also have great conference facilities. We've got offices in Glasgow and Brussels too.

