

COSLA's Response to 'If not now, when?'
Social Renewal Advisory Board



The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities ([COSLA](#)) is the voice of Local Government in Scotland and represents the collective political views of all 32 Scottish councils.

Below is COSLA's response to '[If not now, when?](#)' the report of the Social Renewal Advisory Board published in January 2021.

COSLA has welcomed the publication of the Social Renewal Advisory Board's report and its 20 Calls to Action for a fairer and more equal Scotland. The report recognises the inequalities facing our most vulnerable people and communities, and the Board's calls to build on and grow from the lessons learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic are to be commended.

Throughout the pandemic Local Government has been at the forefront of the response supporting people and communities. It is the anchor in our communities and has worked tirelessly to support our most vulnerable people; children, young people and families; the elderly; local businesses; and provided the services that protect and improve our physical and emotional well-being and the environment. Local Government works with our diverse communities and local organisations every day to bring about change, to respect human rights and equalities and to embed local democracy and to ensure the voices of people are heard.

Recognising the need to embed the positive and rapid action taken throughout the pandemic and commit to a renewal that meets the needs of our people and communities, Local Government published its [Blueprint](#) in September 2020.

The six priority areas within the Blueprint (Strengthening Local Democracy; Funding Services and Communities; Wellbeing including Social Care; Children, Young People and Education; the Economy and Environment and Supporting Vulnerable Communities) resonate and align with the Board's 20 Calls to Action and demonstrates the leadership, services and support that Local Government delivers on across Scotland.

That being said, the need to progress, adapt and build back better is well recognised and we are committed to working in partnership with Scottish Government, the voluntary and third sector and our people and communities to deliver long term and sustainable impacts.

It is welcomed that the Calls to Action, and the report, are framed around Equality and Human Rights and set alongside the Christie Commission's four pillars of prevention, partnership, people and performance, which COSLA committed to on publication of the report in 2011.

COSLA and Local Government are fully committed to Equality and Human Rights and are members of [The National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership](#) which published its recommendations in March 2021. Several Calls to Action and recommendations are included within the work of the Taskforce and will be addressed through their work.

It is valued that the Calls to Action have been developed through engagement with a wide and varied range of people, experts, groups and communities with vast experience and knowledge.

COSLA is encouraged that the Board's independent report raises many Calls to Action and recommendations that have long been called for by Local Government. However, there must be recognition that many will not be implemented or delivered without adequate resourcing and flexibility for local authorities and many require additional powers to be devolved to both Local and Scottish Government, while others will take many years and parliamentary terms to achieve.

The crucial elements to establish in the coming months and years out of the pandemic will be on the action required to deliver the change necessary to positively impact the people and communities most affected during and pre-COVID-19.

That is why COSLA is clear that Local Government has a key role in driving forward this agenda and should be the lead in local delivery arrangements on many of the Calls to Action and recommendations.

If, collectively across spheres of government and the third sector, we are serious about social renewal and creating a fairer, more equal Scotland, we must act together to deliver real and lasting change.

It is vital to also recognise there are a number of organisations working towards broadly similar actions and objectives and we must ensure, moving forward, that clear measures are in place to avoid duplication of effort and add maximum value and impacts by working together.

In each section of the report - Money & Work; People, Rights and Advancing Equality and Communities and Collective Endeavour, there is little to disagree with. We all want to see such a Scotland. It is appreciated though that there will be challenge around how we get there and without adequate resourcing, fiscal flexibilities, and functional empowerment from Scottish and UK Governments, limited action may be possible.

COSLA wishes to be proactive and positive in its response to this report and create opportunities for innovative and creative approaches, where possible and within existing constraints. The response to each of the Calls to Action summarised at Appendix A include feedback from a range of professional associations from across the Local Government family. Further developed positions and work to better understand specific actions will be discussed through COSLA Boards in due course following the forthcoming Scottish Elections.

Appendix A outlines COSLA's response on each of the Calls to Action

Appendix A

Money and Work	
Calls to Action	COSLA's Response
1. Commit to a Minimum Income Guarantee for all as a long-term aim.	The view is this could make a significant difference in tackling poverty. From experience of the Citizens Basic Income project, it is highly complex and would require more work to explore the feasibility. This would require a significant financial commitment from Scottish Government and the recognition that many of the related powers are held by UK Government.
2. Develop an approach to anti-poverty work, including personal debt, that is designed around the needs of the individual.	<p>COSLA is supportive of this call to action, however the recommendations to achieve this require further consideration; such as the need to ensure that key response services e.g. Scottish Welfare Fund are sufficiently resourced to enable staff to properly support those in greatest need beyond an initial crisis support payment; and the need to ensure ethical, lower cost short term credit options to mitigate against spiralling crisis debt</p> <p>Additionally, COSLA, Improvement Service and Scottish Government are working together to develop a local and national partnership approach to funding debt advice.</p> <p>The IRRV, Falkirk Council, Citizens Advice Scotland and Stepchange produced a guide to Collaborative Council Tax Collection. The plan had been to evaluate it in 2020 but the pandemic has delayed this.</p> <p>There is evidence from the CAPMRF that council tax arrears is one of the most common debt types - the proportion of clients with council tax arrears increased from 12% to 15% in 2019-20.</p> <p>Further development work would be required to understand the detail of statutory advice services and a national approach to financial education.</p>
3. Work in partnership to develop a new social contract on Fair Work.	The assumption is that this is covered as part of the work on No-one Left Behind and addressed through the partnership agreement between Scottish Government and COSLA on employability. There is already the Fair Work Action Plan and is important to link with this to avoid duplication
4. Focus Fair Work actions on those most affected by the pandemic.	COSLA is supportive of this as many groups of people already facing multiple barriers to progress into work or in precarious low income jobs have been additionally and most severely impacted by the pandemic (e.g. women, disabled people, BAME people, young people, etc). In supporting social renewal these groups must be a particular focus whilst

	acknowledging that there will be others displaced but better able to access less intensive support elsewhere. Again, this must link with the Fair Work Action Plan to avoid duplication.
5. Extend free early learning, childcare and social care so all parents and carers can access the childcare they need, when they need it.	Whilst there is acknowledgement this Call to Action would see wide ranging benefits across society, there has to be recognition of the costs of delivering such outcomes. This is also a recommendation from the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls .
People, Rights and Advancing Equality	
Calls to Action	COSLA's Response
6. Incorporate the right to an adequate and accessible home in Scots Law.	Included in the work of the National Taskforce on Human Rights of which COSLA are members.
7. Make sure there are enough homes that are safe, warm, accessible, affordable, and in places people want to live.	This is included in the National Performance Framework and work is underway to address this. Achieving our housing ambitions requires shared commitment and partnership working between spheres of Government. Further engagement with Scottish Government on their Housing to 2040 strategy will be required. COSLA Community Wellbeing Board have agreed that COSLA and Scottish Government should jointly lead the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. An aim of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans is to address housing availability at a local level for those at risk of/experiencing homelessness.
8. Ensure everyone can access nutritious, culturally appropriate and affordable food.	Work has been undertaken to address to ensure children entitled to free school meals have access to support through money or food. Local authorities supported those shielding or isolating with access to food throughout the pandemic. Included in the work of the National Taskforce on Human Rights as part of the right to an adequate standard of living of which COSLA are members.
9. Set a target to end digital exclusion in the next parliamentary term.	A partnership between COSLA, Scottish Government and SCVO has been established through the Connecting Scotland programme; a programme which will take at least 50,000 people out of digital exclusion by the end of this year. The call to deepen the Connecting Scotland programme is welcomed. In addition to digital inclusion, an emerging social theme for digital is that of ethics and rights. Scottish Government has established work to develop a digital ethics framework and a section has been included within the new Digital Strategy on this. There does not appear to be reference to this in the report and ethics and rights are a growing societal concern. The UN refers to Digital Rights as Human Rights for the Digital Era. The Secretary General's " Roadmap for Collaboration " sets out concerns relating to Digital Identity, Data Protection

	<p>and Privacy, Surveillance Technology (including Facial Recognition), online harassment and violence, and the need for content governance.</p> <p>The pandemic has demonstrated the practical benefits of data sharing and data analysis/ analytics for targeting interventions, enabling transparency, and delivering better outcomes. It would be helpful to see greater reference to how data can support the actions set out, whether it is to improve transparency, inform policy, target interventions, or enabling service re-design such as enabling prevention/early intervention.</p>
10. Adopt the principles of Universal Basic Services.	COSLA currently has no position on Universal Basic Services and this would require further discussion through COSLA's governance.
11. Incorporate key international human rights instruments into Scots Law so as to deliver real change.	Included in the work of the National Taskforce on Human Rights of which COSLA are members. Review of the Public Sector Equality Duty was due in 2020 and was delayed, now due in 2021. Local Authorities are currently setting their updated Equality Outcomes for April 2021 – likely to be heavily influence by COVID-19.
12. Take action to realise the human rights of disabled people.	Included in the work of the National Taskforce on Human Rights of which COSLA are members.
13. Build inclusive communication into all national and local government funding requirements.	This is a requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty – to fulfil the duty there must be appropriate communication. There is already the expectation outlined for this to happen, e.g. online in the Public Sector Bodies Digital Accessibility regulations, but funding to recognise the complex range of communications needed for the greater participation, engagement and empowerment of our local communities would be a hugely beneficial. This will be of growing importance if looking towards deliberative democratic reform.
14. Strengthen approaches to prevent and address hate crime and public sexual harassment.	<p>This is part of the Public Sector Equality Duty and should be addressed as part of it. COSLA welcomes the focus, however, as hate crime is increasing across a wide range of protected characteristics and public sexual harassment requires to be addressed. There is a sense that the concept of 'feeling' safe is missing and should be addressed through actions given the wider connections to wellbeing.</p> <p>There are obvious connections to Equally Safe and tackling misogyny, gender discrimination and harassment in the context of gender inequality and violence against women and girls. COSLA's Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group includes work with the Local Government Association and others on 'civility in public life'.</p>
15. Apply the rights and entitlements in this report to all migrants.	We support this call in principle, recognising that it will be challenging in some circumstances to achieve for people seeking asylum and migrants with no recourse to public funds whose rights and entitlements are determined by the UK Government under reserved immigration legislation.

	<p>The New Scots strategy is Scotland's refugee integration strategy and its core partners are COSLA, Scottish Government and Scottish Refugee Council, who work together with a wide range of partners across public, third and private sectors. The Strategy seeks to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are rebuilding their lives from day one of arrival. It covers all aspects of life such as housing, education, access to language acquisition, employability, welfare rights, health and wellbeing, community connections. COSLA and local authorities have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to the delivery of this strategy at a political and officer level.</p> <p>There are a number of local authorities that offer placements to UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) and support them through their asylum journey providing Looked After Children type services. COSLA supports local authorities in the provision of these services.</p> <p>COSLA also has well established positions on asylum dispersal, refugee resettlement, New Scots and the rights and entitlements of migrants.</p> <p>There is a call for COSLA and Scottish Government to publish an 'Anti-destitution strategy' accompanied by funding for delivery. There are plans to undertake a socio-economic impact assessment of the no recourse to public funds policy. This is currently being finalised for publication and will be launched before the Scottish Parliament election.</p> <p>This Strategy sets out our vision and priorities for ending destitution in partnership with the third sector. It includes calls that are consistent with this report's recommendations for the UK Government to remove the NRPF conditions to reduce the risks of extreme poverty, rough sleeping and hunger as well as wider social and economic inequalities created by these rules.</p> <p>It also describes what we will do collectively using our devolved powers and resources to ensure a basic safety net is in place (food, cash, accommodation etc) as well as equal treatment across our public services and communities – COSLA has pressed for resourcing and a significant ask for Local Government is to work on strengthening the support provided to families with children and vulnerable adults under devolved safeguarding duties.</p> <p>We will be working over the next three years with Scottish Government to deliver on this long term work that should help to achieve the aspiration of extending all of the rights and entitlements in the SRAB report to migrants with no recourse.</p>
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Communities and Collective Endeavour	
Calls to Action	COSLA's Response
16. Further shift the balance of power so individuals and communities have more control over decisions that affect their lives.	<p>Many of the recommendations in this Call to Action are covered under the Community Empowerment Act (2015) Scotland and the issue is likely to be the extent to which the ambition of the Act has been realised on the ground. There is a need for funding for capacity building in those communities who are least able to engage but this will only come to fruition once poverty and inequality are addressed. Otherwise, the risk is that those more affluent communities have greater influence than those in more deprived areas.</p> <p>The Local Governance Review includes a shared commitment to subsidiarity and includes five democratic renewal principles. COSLA, along with Scottish Government, is committed to the Review to ensure diverse communities and different places have greater control and influence over the decisions that affect them most. Whilst work was progressing well in early 2020, the pandemic has paused progress.</p> <p>COSLA and Scottish Government jointly agreed to mainstream Participatory Budgeting by the end of 2021. Whilst great progress was being made across local authorities, the pandemic has resulted in much of this work being paused. As such a flexible extension was agreed between COSLA and Scottish Government in January 2021. Local authorities remain committed to delivering on the framework agreement as outlined at COSLA Leaders in 2021. Additionally, in 2020 Scottish Government established a National PB Strategic Group tasked with exploring Scotland's wider approach to Participatory Budgeting. A key recommendation of this group is to explore the rollout of mainstream PB across the wider public sector, including Scottish Government.</p>
17. Improve service delivery and design by empowering frontline teams and the people and communities they serve.	<p>The Scottish Approach to Service Design programme is a framework with a shared set of principles and tools which help design services around the needs of people. Scottish Government and the wider Local Government family are working in partnership to deliver on this framework across Scotland.</p> <p>Throughout the pandemic some governance in very legislatively bound areas (e.g. social work) were removed, relaxed, or scrutiny was relaxed. People were empowered and encouraged to do things differently and quickly and, whilst there may be risks, the feeling is Scottish Government has been quick to put those pre-existing systems back in place. Scotland could do better as a nation if more local action could be taken quickly rather than directed nationally.</p>

	Again, there are connections with the Local Governance Review and the three empowerments (Functional, Fiscal and Community) and the local flexibility it could deliver for communities and local need.
18. Build on new ways of working, based on what has worked well during the pandemic, and develop new arrangements for local governance.	COSLA has been resolute in the ask to end single year budgets which would not only create benefits for local authorities but across the third and voluntary sectors. COSLA is committed to and supportive of this action as outlined in the Spending Review .
19. Focus everyone and all activities on building more resilient, fairer, healthier and stronger communities and places.	All actions in this section of the report sit alongside Public Health Scotland's aspiration for Healthy Communities and adding value to local systems. Public Health Scotland, Improvement Service and COSLA are committed to place-based approaches and recovery. It would be transformational to develop new ways of bringing together the totality of the resource working locally, regionally and nationally through this narrative. As previous mentioned, the links to the Local Governance Review in this section are clear given the emphasis on how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and Local Government and with communities and places.
Closing the gap between promise and practice	
Calls to Action	COSLA's Response
20. Co-design how we assess progress towards renewal, incorporating deeper engagement with those people and communities who have first-hand experience of poverty, inequality and restricted life chances.	Whilst COSLA is supportive of this action and can demonstrate how assessing progress is co-designed with people and communities across Local Government, it requires to be funded and supported appropriately and we don't believe there's capacity within the system to do this at scale, at present.