



COSLA



# Mid-Term Report

March 2024

*Our vision and priorities for Local Government  
and Communities across Scotland*

# Introduction from COSLA President



Councillor Shona Morrison  
COSLA President

Welcome to the COSLA Mid-term Report. It captures our key work and achievements at the mid-point of the Local Government term 2022-2027 and my term as COSLA's President.

You will see from the report that there is a lot to be proud of and a range of areas where COSLA has made real progress on behalf of our membership, but there remains more to be done.

Importantly the report highlights where improvements and further progress need to be made against the context of the COSLA Plan, launched in November 2022.

The plan sets out our vision and six priorities for Local Government and communities across Scotland:



As well as showing how Local Government continues to adapt and respond to an ever-changing context, this report illustrates just how crucial our councils' work is – and how hard we all work to ensure that COSLA and Local Government are respected and listened to in Scotland, the UK and in Europe.

Over the last few years, the Vice President, the cross-party team of COSLA Spokespeople and I have made a concerted effort to strengthen relations across the Local Government family and with the wider public sector, including with the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, and Accounts Commission.

Whilst we have concerns about how it is being observed, I am proud of the Verity House Agreement, signed in June last year by all Political Group Leaders.

The agreement recognises that there is a need to work and look differently at issues like poverty, net zero and public service reform. The very fact that the Verity House Agreement

exists gives us a lever to articulate, progress and deal with any issues that arise, and a framework for external scrutiny of the relationship between local and national government- indeed the only framework to do so until the European Charter of Local Self Government enters law.

The Verity House Agreement has been noted by colleagues elsewhere in the UK as something that they would like to achieve. It provides us with the stepping stone required for a partnership that can drive us towards the preventative and person-centred approach to finding solutions that we have long been talking about. It is a key building block to enabling people in Scotland to 'live well locally', a long-held aspiration of COSLA on behalf of our membership and our communities.

It is an agreement worth pursuing. It is not only good for Local Government, but also for the people of Scotland.

We are the locally elected members directly representing people in our local communities, and it is important that our local knowledge and experiences shape and influence the way policies are designed and services are delivered on the ground.

Scottish Local Government has a long and proud tradition of being both innovative and helping those most in need. We pride ourselves on often being the champions for the most vulnerable in our communities.

I hope that this report gives you – **our membership, and our most important audience** – a flavour of this.

.....  
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.....

In the lead up to this report, the Vice- President, the Chief Executive and I have been visiting member councils across Scotland. Between those visits, this report and our mini-conference in March, we hope to give you a real sense of the work of COSLA. **We are your organisation** so we must continually check that we are meeting your needs and expectations.

I hope you find this report useful, and that it gives you a clear sense of what has been achieved so far but importantly what's still to be done.

# What is COSLA?

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

We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation, representing all 32 councils in Scotland. We work on behalf of our members to focus on their priorities, challenges and opportunities.

We fulfil our role by positively engaging with other spheres of government, key stakeholders and professional associations on policy, powers, funding and legislation.

As a champion for councils, we:

engage

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

lead

LEAD reforms that improve public services and save money effectively

develop

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

negotiate

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

campaign

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

support

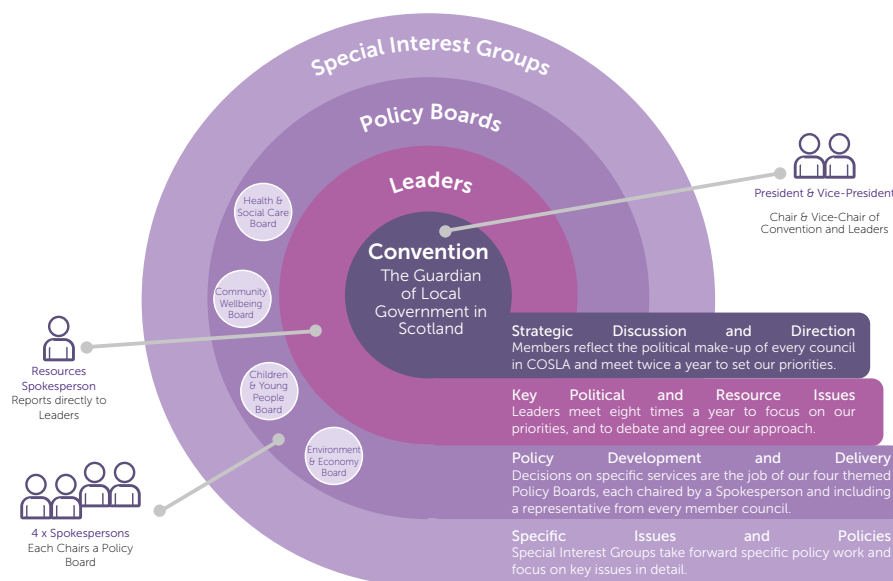
SUPPORT councils to work together, and deliver shared services that increase their capacity

champion

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

## How We Work

We are a politically led, cross-party organisation. That means that what we do, and how we do it, is decided democratically by elected Councillors from across our 32 member councils. COSLA is led by its President, Vice President, and five Spokespeople who represent COSLA across key policy areas. These office bearers were elected by the COSLA Convention in 2022 for the Local Government term. Appointments are cross-party and the last election saw us once again elect a gender-balanced political leadership team.



## Our Political Leadership Team



President  
Cllr Shona Morrison  
(Moray, SNP)



Vice-President  
Cllr Steven Heddle  
(Orkney, Independent)



Children & Young People  
Cllr Tony Buchanan  
(East Renfrewshire, SNP)



Community Wellbeing  
Cllr Maureen Chalmers  
(South Lanarkshire, SNP)



Environment & Economy  
Cllr Gail Macgregor  
(Dumfries & Galloway, CON)



Health & Social Care  
Cllr Paul Kelly  
(North Lanarkshire, LAB)



Resources  
Cllr Katie Hagmann  
(Dumfries & Galloway, SNP)

## COSLA's Priorities – Key Work and Achievements and Looking Forward

The six priorities in the [COSLA Plan](#) reflect the needs of our member councils and therefore drive our work.

To address the priorities, our President, Vice-President, Spokespeople, and officers across COSLA work relentlessly on behalf of our members, across a broad range of policy and business areas, and with professional associations and stakeholders across all sectors.

The following pages describe the key work and achievements over the last two and a half years under each of the COSLA priorities and importantly, we have outlined what we need to focus on for the rest of the Local Government term.

We have also provided an update on what we are doing within COSLA to further meet the needs of our members, including in relation to our communications.



# Strengthen Local Democracy



The work of COSLA is firmly focused on strengthening local democracy and ensuring that Local Government in Scotland is properly and fairly recognised for all that it does as an equal sphere of the country's democratic governance.

Whilst the operational, financial, and political context remains extremely challenging for Scottish Local Government, over the last two years some significant work has been progressed, as described below.

## Key Work and Achievements

### Verity House Agreement (VHA)

The signing of the VHA, though a significant first step in resetting relations between Scottish and Local Government, still allows for differences of position between local and national governments. It provides a reference point for behaviour and practice that will help COSLA drive forward the work required to reshape the relationship and improve outcomes for communities.



### European Charter of Local Self-Government

COSLA has long campaigned for adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and has supported the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Scotland) Bill through the entire parliamentary process to date. More than two years have passed since the UK Supreme Court announced its decision that various sections of the Bill were outside the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament.

COSLA's Presidential Team and officers have pressed Scottish Government for this to be progressed at pace and for a firm date when the Bill will formally commence reconsideration by Parliament, including the timescales up to the point of Royal Assent.

### Local Governance Review (LGR)

In 2017 Scottish Government and COSLA launched the Local Governance Review aiming to strengthen local democracy and ensure Scotland's diverse communities and different places have greater control and influence over the decisions by public bodies that affect them most.

The intention is to engage with people to explore how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local government and with communities throughout Scotland. The focus is on improving outcomes for people looking across all of Scotland's public services.

### Innovating, Developing, Transforming Special Interest Group

Leaders agreed the formation of the 'Innovating, Developing and Transforming' Special Interest Group in May 2023 to discuss the range of work tied directly to the principles of the VHA and in particular person-centred public service reform (PSR). The group has had presentations, discussion, and updates on Scottish Government's PSR programme, the LGR (including Democracy Matters and Single Authority Models), Open Government, and Community Planning.

### Participatory Democracy

Great progress has been made in embedding Participatory Budgeting in Local Government. The 1% Community Choices target is being met with

more than £150m being spent and 100,000 people participating annually. COSLA's free to use digital participation software CONSUL is being used across councils to support PB. COSLA is working with Scottish Government to develop the experience gained with PB into a wider Participatory Democracy framework in support of our obligations under the Community Empowerment Act.

### COSLA in Europe

Over the two last years, COSLA members with European and International mandates have participated in a wide range of engagements, promoting Scottish Local Government and making an active contribution to European democracy. Supported by COSLA's Brussels Office, this has included attending the Council of Europe Congress for Local and Regional Authorities, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the global umbrella forum the United Cities Local Government (UCLG). COSLA on behalf of Scottish Local Government has continued to manage constructive post EU Exit relations and oversight of new UK/EU trading arrangements by participating in the Contact Group with the EU Committee of the Regions to ensure the best interests of Local Government and our communities are fairly and properly represented.

### Scottish Local Authority Remuneration Committee (SLARC)

Over the past year Scottish Government and COSLA have provided policy and administrative support to SLARC, whose remit considered councillors' workload and responsibilities, use of social media and other technology, increase in formal meetings, and average time spent carrying out duties. They published in February 2024, providing recommendations that address this remit alongside other areas that emerged during the research process. The recommendations are now being considered by the barriers to elected office group and ministers.

### Barriers to Elected Office

This Special Interest Group aims to "tackle barriers to elected office for under-represented groups, to ensure elected members are representative of the communities that they serve". The group is jointly chaired by the Presidential team, meeting quarterly to actively consider areas including councillor remuneration, councillor safety, the culture in councils, and barriers to candidacy. In considering the recommendations of SLARC, the group will use their experiences to shape COSLA's approach to implementation and lobbying. They are also looking at the issue of proxy voting with officers actively exploring options to enable introduction of this provision should councils wish it.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Steven Heddle)



There are a number of key areas where we need to focus our efforts over the coming months, including:

- agreeing the accountability and assurance arrangements for the VHA
- securing a partnership agreement with UK Government departments
- enhancing our working relationship with Scottish Parliament
- supporting the passage of the European Charter of Local Self-Government before the Summer 2024 recess
- taking forward the recommendations of the SLARC report
- progressing the Single Authority discussions and wider public service reform agenda in partnership with local and national partners
- continue EU and international engagement with European and human rights-based organisations,
- use our mandates to promote the right to local self-government, the principle of subsidiarity and for strengthened local democracy.

# Secure Sustainable Funding

## Local Government Finance



The current economic climate presents significant financial challenges due to increased service demand, high inflation rates, increased operational costs and an ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Despite this, COSLA has continued to progress areas that aim to provide further fiscal and financial empowerment to councils.

COSLA works with professional associations to secure adequate and sustainable funding for councils to enable them to provide high quality services. We lead the preparation and lobbying on the Local Government Settlement as the Scottish Budget makes its way through Parliament each year. We are also involved with financial memorandums, costing of delivery plans attached to strategies and cost modelling.

### Key Work and Achievements

#### Verity House Agreement

As part of the Verity House Agreement we've seen a start in the reduction of ringfenced funding in the 2024/25 Local Government Settlement, as over **£1bn in funding** was baselined for a number of policy areas.

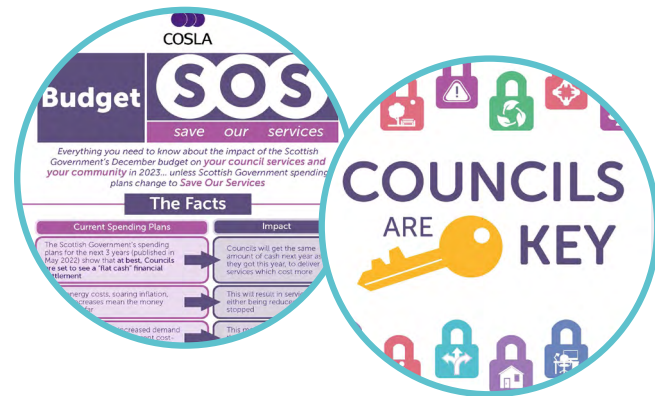
#### Fiscal Framework

Work on a Fiscal Framework is progressing, including a commitment to engage earlier on the Scottish Budget, improve fiscal flexibilities for councils and develop additional revenue raising powers such as the Visitor Levy. In September 2023 Convention reaffirmed the commitment to creating a Fiscal Framework, including exploration of a 'rules basis' i.e. the interrelationship between Scottish and Local Government funding each year.

#### Budget Lobbying Campaign

Each year COSLA undertakes a Budget Lobbying Campaign on behalf of Local Government with the aim of securing additional funding from

both the Scottish and UK Governments. For the 23/24 budget we focused on 'Budget SOS: Save Our Services' and for 24/25 'Councils are Key'. In each year COSLA has been successful in securing additional benefits to Local Government either in the form of additional funding or financial flexibilities.



#### Pay Negotiations

We supported pay negotiations, securing almost **£400m in additional funding** to support pay awards for Local Government staff in 23/24. This allowed Councils to settle pay claims and avoid further strike action.

#### Community Living Change Fund

Through lobbying Scottish Government, we secured a **one-year extension to the Community Living Change Fund** to support Integration Joint Boards to reduce delayed discharges from hospital while also supporting those with complex needs.

#### Fair Work First

In relation to 'Fair Work First' policy for grants from Scottish Government, we agreed a **single exception template** for Local Government, to reduce administration burden on councils.

#### Flood Risk Management

12 recommendations have been jointly agreed to address affordability of the Flood Risk Management Capital Programme which equates to **£42m per annum**. Work is well underway on a programme management 'gateway' approach for future flood risk management schemes to receive funding. This will ensure that councils are able to invest to protect communities.

#### Homes for Ukraine

**£260m has been secured** for Local Government since Homes for Ukraine/Super Sponsor

Schemes began in 2022. This includes funding from both UK and Scottish Governments to support resettlement across Scotland. COSLA continues to lobby for adequate funding that reflects current pressures to support people to have flourishing lives in Scotland.

#### Housing

Regulations have now been introduced to provide councils with flexibility to charge a premium up to 100% of Council Tax to incentivise availability of housing. The majority of councils are taking advantage of this flexibility from 1 April 2024. Scottish Government are also committed to increasing this **premium for second and empty homes** and are intending to enact primary legislation to enable it.

#### COSLA Resources Spokesperson

The COSLA Resources Spokesperson is a **key member of a number of groups** such as the Joint Working Group on Council Tax Reform (and other sources of Local Government Funding) and the Deputy First Minister's Tax Advisory Group.

### Feature: Visitor Levy Bill

After **5 years of lobbying** by COSLA on a local revenue raising power, the Visitor Levy Bill was laid in Parliament and is now progressing. The Bill represents a key area of partnership working between Scottish and Local Government and will see significant independent revenue-raising powers be granted to councils. The Bill is one element in a wider programme of powers, including the ability to levy cruise ships, which we hope to see introduced in the coming years. This will allow Councils that chose to introduce a Levy to invest in the tourist economy and communities.





# Secure Sustainable Funding

## Local Government Workforce



In recent years, COSLA has managed demanding employment relations across our four pay bargaining groups, set against periods of industrial action, the ongoing impact of a recruitment and retention crisis across many Local Government professions, the continued legacy of the pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis and the heightened financial uncertainty experienced by Local Government. This has all meant that our ability to make pay settlements, that won't impact jobs and local service delivery, has been extremely challenging.

Against this context, we work closely with Local Government stakeholders in negotiations, to understand fully councils' needs and concerns and to provide COSLA Leaders with informed recommendations and analysis. We also work across a range of policy areas such as Fair work and Children's Services, ensuring workforce issues are fully considered in all policy development.

### Key Work and Achievements

#### Pay Settlements

Pay settlements for all Local Government employees.

#### Pay and Leave

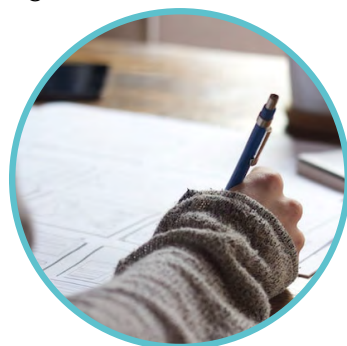
Progressing work with the teaching unions on the Pay and Leave Specification to consider a concern by the teachers' unions about the way in which terms and conditions adjust pay when a member of staff is promoted.

#### Job Sizing Framework

Progressing work to review the teachers Job Sizing Framework to ensure, among other union concerns, that the scoring of Deputy Heads and Heads is appropriate.

#### Job Evaluation

Supporting the Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Job Evaluation Joint Technical Working Group in producing an amended SJC Job Evaluation Version 3, agreed at the SJC AGM in February 2024.



#### Holiday Entitlement

With the Society of Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS), guidance to councils on the implications of the 'Brazel vs Harpur Trust' Supreme Court decision about the calculation of holiday entitlement for employees with term-time contracts.

#### National Care Service

A cross-COSLA team has worked on National Care Service developments, advising on the workforce implications of a major national change programme.



#### Payroll Support

Production of spreadsheets to support council HR/Payroll teams in councils following agreement of the 2023/24 pay settlement.

#### Headteacher Recruitment

Involvement in the headteacher recruitment working group with ADES colleagues, successfully supporting the delivery of job sizing training in partnership with Trade Union colleagues and engaged in discussions considering how those in additional support needs roles can be developed and their role better recognised.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Katie Hagmann)



On behalf of councils we will:

- Alongside the **Visitor Levy Bill**, continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure the introduction of local Cruise Ship Levy powers.
- To further progress the **Fiscal Framework**, explore fully a "rules-based" approach to align Local and Scottish Government funding.
- Urgently engage with Ministers to progress **Council Tax reform in 24/25**, building on COSLA's longstanding position.
- Aim to reach **pay settlements in 2024/25** across our four bargaining groups, avoiding delays and industrial action, and complete the review of pay negotiations agreed by COSLA Leaders.
- Progress work in relation to **terms and conditions** including looking at a reduction in the working week, professional fees, investigating £15 per hour minimum rate of pay, and the Chief Executives remuneration review.
- To address the **recruitment and retention crisis**, continue to work with councils and partners on data and evidence, and workforce planning.

# Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities



**COSLA has continued to lead the improvement agenda, ensuring that social care support enables our communities to live healthy, independent lives, and improves outcomes for individuals and the people who care for them.**

Health and social care faces a range of challenges due to the current financial context, our aging demographic and ongoing recruitment and retention issues. Despite these, there is a clear and accepted need to develop, innovate and transform Local Government services to increase capacity, reduce workforce pressures and to support people to live well locally.

## Key Work and Achievements

### System Pressures

Our health, social work and social care services have faced increasing demand, with the winters bringing exceptional challenges. In recognition of this, there is a need for a partnership approach across the whole system to enable the sector to respond to these surges. For the first time, COSLA and the Scottish Government published a joint *Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan* in October 2023 which set out local and national actions to ensure people continued to receive the right care in the right setting. Developing this plan was not without its challenges, particularly around the need to focus on people rather than systems and services. To maintain a joined-up approach all year-round, COSLA jointly set-up a new and robust structure with key partners embodied in the Collaborative Response and Assurance Group and Whole System Oversight Group, which is co-chaired by our Spokesperson and the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing.

### Protecting Local Democracy: National Care Service

A key achievement of COSLA has been our work on the Scottish Government's National Care Service proposals. The draft legislation would have enabled the transfer of staff, functions and accountability for social care from Local Government to Ministers. COSLA successfully secured agreement to see the proposed legislation amended in order that councils would retain their staff, functions and assets - and accountability would be shared with national government. Furthermore, the team has engaged in complex negotiations to continue to protect Local Government's interests with regards to the establishment of a National Care Board, delegation of children's justice services and the direction of



funding. While there is still a great deal of work to do to further develop and agree the detail of this high-level agreement, COSLA remains committed to advocating on councils' behalf for a system that helps those who need support, instead of focusing on costly structural changes.

### Collaboration

Our COSLA Plan sets out the importance for us to make the case for a rights-based, preventative approach to health and social care, and it is this ethos that the Health and Social Care team, working collaboratively with colleagues across Local and National Government, NHS, third and independent sectors seek to bring to the vast programmes of work in their remit.

This ethos is evident in the development of the new joint strategies for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Dementia, Health and Social Care Data, Suicide Prevention and subsequent delivery plans which have a person-centred focus.

The team continue to work with Scottish Government to shape and influence proposed legislation and policy ensuring that there is consideration for potential impact for Local Government, including financial implications. So far this term this has included work to progress fair work in social care; working with partners across the sector to develop ethical commissioning

principles; jointly publishing the Self-directed Support Improvement Plan; and taking forward the joint Public Health agenda, and much more.

### Harnessing the Potential in Digital and Data

COSLA recognises that whole system transformation is needed to meet future service demands and has for some time been committed to ensuring that digital and data are central to the transformation required in health and social care. While digital and data can never replace the need for and the role of a strong workforce, they are key enablers and can help support the workforce, and the health and social care system as well as people accessing health and social care support.

Significant work has been progressing over the last two years particularly to harness the opportunity that digitally enabled services and data-driven innovation brings to support the shift towards prevention, thereby helping to reduce system pressures. This includes the move for telecare from analogue to digital; the work to develop the integrated social care and health record and improve access to information for people accessing and delivering services; the development of a more consistent approach to information governance and ensuring that our workforce and infrastructure are digitally capable.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Paul Kelly)



There is no doubt that the next two years will continue to present significant challenges for our health and social care system, as well as the wider Local Government services that deliver vital upstream support and contribute to the wellbeing of our communities. Coupled with the uncertainty around the proposals for a National Care Service, there is a pressing need to focus on improving and innovating services now so that our communities receive the sustainable, personalised, and rights-based support they deserve. I look forward to leading the vital work set out within this report and am committed in my role as Spokesperson to continually promoting and upholding the important role councils hold in improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.



# Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People



Our work in relation to children and young people is underpinned by the ambition of tackling inequality because currently all children and young people do not have an equal starting point in life. We do this by ensuring Local Government remains accountable for services and supporting change, reform and improvement.

## Key Work and Achievements

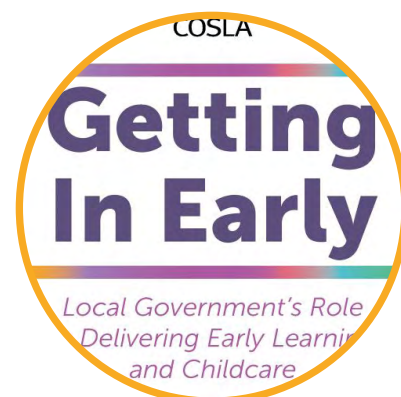
### Learning Opportunities

COSLA co-convened the National Discussion on the future of Scottish Education with the Scottish Government, engaging over 38,000 people across Scotland including members of the COSLA Children and Young People Board. The final output from the discussion, [All Learners in Scotland Matter](#), includes a new vision, values and a call to action.

Whilst doing this, we have maintained our focus on increasing attainment and narrowing the poverty related attainment gap and progress was evidenced in the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) 2023 and overall pass rates for National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2023. This reflects sustained efforts by teachers, schools, children, young people and their families, set against the challenging backdrop of increasing pressures on Local Government budgets, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which we know has impacted educational attainment around the world.

COSLA published [Getting in Early](#), highlighting the central role of councils in supporting families and helping to secure a positive start in life for the youngest in our communities, through delivery of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) across Scotland. It highlights successes of the 1140 hours expansion – which has seen increasing uptake and high-levels of parental satisfaction – including partnership and joined-up working;

high and improving uptake; workforce growth; and high levels of satisfaction amongst parents and carers.



### Care and Wellbeing

COSLA and Scottish Government's **Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board** supported the ongoing development of policy, tools for the workforce.

**Almost 57,000** children, young people and family members utilised our community-based supports and school counselling services between July and December 2022.

**Keeping The Promise** continues to be a priority for COSLA and Local Government. We have worked closely with The Promise Scotland to influence the content of Plan 24 – 30, due to be published in June 2024. COSLA has worked with councils to

influence and design the Monitoring Framework for Scotland which will give Scotland an understanding of collective progress, challenges and successes towards Keeping The Promise by 2030.



COSLA published [good practice principles](#) to support councils with the management of **school meal debt**. Whilst retaining flexibility and discretion for local approaches to be taken forward, the principles are intended to support council and school staff to review and develop school meal debt policy and practice, as part of councils' wider approaches to supporting children, young people and families.

### Rights and Protection

COSLA has continued to engage in the work to incorporate the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** into Scots law. We continue to work to ensure that councils receive appropriate guidance and support to enable them to fulfil their duties locally.

COSLA is supporting councils to implement the [Scottish Child Interview Model](#), a new, trauma-informed approach to forensic interviewing which supports a child's right to recovery from abuse and helps to secure best evidence to enable improved safety and justice outcomes for children and young people.

Since 2020, **over 6,000 children and young people** have benefited from an improved experience under the new model.

Representing councils' interests in the ongoing consideration of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, as well as shaping and agreeing the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for Foster and Kinship Carers and the Whole Family Wellbeing.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Tony Buchanan)



Our work will continue to centre around tackling inequality and providing the support required for children and young people to thrive. This will include:

- Ensuring that Local Government has what it needs to deliver on the ambition of the Promise, including the actions as set out in Plan 24 – 30.
- Supporting Local Government to meet the ambitious stretch aims they have set to improve attainment, health and wellbeing through education. As well as promoting the centrality of schools and councils in education reform across national education bodies, curriculum and qualifications, to ensure the best possible outcome for children and young people.
- Ensuring councils have the right guidance and resources to embed and fulfil children's rights across services, policy, and practice.
- Promoting and supporting our children and young people's right to achieve the highest obtainable standard of physical and mental health.



# Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy



The just transition to a net zero economy is a long-term goal and not one which can be completed within the lifetime of the COSLA Plan, but some important strategic steps have been taken since the plan was agreed in 2022.

## Key Work and Achievements

### Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

We know that the just transition will only be achieved by a whole government approach, which unites Local and Scottish Government's collective resources and expertise. This was our key argument to the **Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee** during its inquiry into the role of Local Government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland. The Committee report, which was published in January 2023, reflected positively on COSLA's work to champion a more effective way of delivering the just transition.

This report also stimulated work by our partners in the Scottish Cities Alliance, which is now coming together with our thinking and that of Scottish Government to form what we are calling the **climate delivery framework**, which will be a new and more effective way of delivering the just transition. We plan that this will lead to a report to Leaders next month on the way forward. This new way of working will be underpinned by data on climate change, so it is really helpful that 2023 also saw the creation of the jointly funded **Scottish Climate Intelligence Service**. The service, which is a pioneering collaboration between Local and Scottish Government and the University of Edinburgh is now in its first year of full operation and will be reporting its progress regularly to the COSLA Environment and Economy Board.

### Circular Economy

The **circular economy** is a key part of the just transition. Consequently, the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill, the Recycling Improvement Fund and engagement with the UK Government on its packaging extended producer responsibility scheme have been key priorities for COSLA. We are in the process of lobbying on the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill and we hope to make some constructive changes to it when it reaches stage 2 of the Parliamentary process.

On waste funding, the last two years have seen considerable work by COSLA and its Local Government partners on the delivery of the £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund. This has led to about £60 million being allocated to 37 projects across 25 councils. The fund has two further years to run and will remain a focus for COSLA. The packaging extended producer responsibility scheme will also become an important revenue stream for councils to invest in waste services. The development of this scheme has required



extensive engagement with councils, Scottish Government, DEFRA and the other UK Local Government associations, with more work required in 2024.

### UK Development Funding

The just transition to a net zero economy featured strongly in our thinking as we sought to influence UK Government's approach to the **UK development funding**. Immediately prior to the Local Government election, COSLA worked closely with officers in Local Government and with the UK and Scottish Governments to shape the strategic interventions for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to make them more relevant for councils in Scotland. This included adding references to net zero policy delivery. Since then, COSLA has sought to influence UK Government funding as constructively as possible, with regular meetings with Ministers and officials in Scotland. We have recently also worked with both the Scottish and UK Governments on guidance for the UK Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns.

### COP28

We recently worked to secure a **virtual presence at COP28**, working closely with Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council. While this unfortunately did not materialise, utilising our good links with international partners we still contributed to collective Local Government advocacy with COSLA's logo and voice still represented. We are already looking ahead to COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, as COSLA has been represented either virtually or in person since COP21, where the UN Paris Climate Agreement was signed.



### Looking Forward (Cllr Gail Macgregor)



There can be no just transition without significant progress in the key sectors of transport and heat decarbonisation. This now need to be the focus of COSLA's work on the just transition if we are to make a meaningful difference by the end of the COSLA Plan. Transport and heat are key priorities for COSLA, but we need to do much more in both sectors if we want to make the substantial progress necessary.

- On heat, COSLA has just responded to the consultation on the Heat in Buildings Bill and will be working with Scottish Government on the final legislation which will come to Parliament in the next 12 months.
- On transport, our priorities remain public transport, active travel and electric vehicle infrastructure, but more strategically we will need to consider with Scottish Government practical measures for reducing demand for car use, as this is the single largest source of transport emissions even with an increase in the number of electric vehicles on the road.

Going forward transport and heat are likely areas for prioritisation by the climate delivery framework described earlier.

# Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities

## Migration, Population, Demographic Change, Equality and Human Rights



COSLA works across a range of policy areas relating to migration, population, demographic change, equality and human rights, as well as providing operational support to councils in their work with migrants, including refugees and people seeking asylum.

### Key Work and Achievements

#### Humanitarian Protection Schemes (including Ukraine)

Over the past two years, unprecedented numbers of people have sought humanitarian protection in Scotland. Councils have been at the forefront of ensuring those seeking protection have found a safe and welcoming place in Scotland despite the significant financial and accommodation challenges that they face. Over 26,700 displaced people from Ukraine have arrived under the Scottish Super Sponsor and Home for Ukraine Schemes. Some Ukrainians have been accommodated in long-term accommodation but many more have been housed in hotels, ships, and with individual hosts, which has had significant implications for council resettlement work.

In 2022, the introduction of a mandated national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children was introduced, which has seen over **400 young people** arriving into the care of Scottish councils. Councils have also been managing the impact of hotels being used to house asylum applicants and the widening of asylum dispersal for the first time outside of Glasgow. As a result, there are now over 5500 asylum applicants living across the country. Councils also continue to support other humanitarian protection schemes and, since 2021, have received over 1,300 people via Afghan Resettlement and Relocation Programmes, and over 300 people through the UK Resettlement Scheme.

#### Ending Destitution Together

Substantive work has been undertaken to update the National [Migrants Rights and Entitlements Guidance](#) and supporting resources for [councillors](#) and [council staff](#).

COSLA has conducted a survey of councils to gauge the scale and complexity of statutory support provided to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) households at risk of destitution. Evidence from the survey shows that in 2022/23 councils supported over **1500 NRPF households** to access support at a cost of at least £8.3m; an increase of over 700 cases supported and rise of £2.4m costs incurred from the previous survey period.

#### New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy and Supporting Fund

The third iteration of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy was endorsed by Council Leaders in February 2024. The partnership strategy between COSLA, Scottish Government and Scottish Refugee Council coordinates efforts of partners across Scotland involved in working toward better outcomes for forced migrants. 500 people (including a wide range of LA officers) have attended the New Scots conference and stakeholder engagement events to shape the strategy.

COSLA has been working in partnership with the Scottish Government, Scottish Refugee Council, and the University of Glasgow to deliver the New Scots Integration Delivery Project (NSRIDP), a project funded by the EU Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF). 56 projects, in which 16 were councils, received a share of **£2.8 million** to deliver initiatives designed to help New Scots settle in their communities. Much of the learning from the projects is recorded on the recently launched New Scots website: [New Scots - Bringing our communities together, today & tomorrow](#).



#### Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) Visa

Since 2022, COSLA's Hong Kong Welcome Hub-funded ESOL and Employment Programme has supported around **400 Hongkongers** with bespoke

English Language and Employment support. Our online [Welcome Hub](#) provides support to Hong Kong migrants and councils to help increase awareness, access to support and knowledge on topics such as No Recourse to Public Funds, Housing, English as a Second Language (ESOL) courses and more. The Welcome Hub continues to fund organisations that support Hongkongers in Scotland including through cultural activities, immigration advice, English language and employment and general guidance; and continues to provide support directly and through our website to councils.

#### Gypsy /Travellers Accommodation Fund

COSLA has worked in partnership with Scottish Government to deliver the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund, which is providing **£20m to councils** between 2021-2026 for more and better Gypsy/Traveller accommodation. There are six councils currently progressing projects. This work is improving living conditions for residents and supporting councils to meet equality and human rights duties, as well as building a strong evidence and knowledge base to ensure accommodation meets the need of Gypsy/Travellers.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Maureen Chalmers)



We will continue to lobby UK and Scottish Government to ensure that they are aware of the concurrent pressures being faced by councils and the need for a holistic approach to be taken which does not view individual humanitarian schemes in isolation.

We will work with Scottish Government and Scottish Refugee Council to ensure that the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy is published by the end of March 24 and, thereafter, to develop and publish the associated Delivery Plans by the end of June 24.

We will work with Scottish Government, councils, and wider partners to develop the second phase of the joint Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan, which will be published by Autumn 2024.



# Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities



## Tackling Poverty & Inequalities, Protecting the Vulnerable, Strengthening Communities and Improving their Safety & Sustainability

### Key Work and Achievements

#### Community Justice & Safety

COSLA continues supporting councils' efforts to reduce reoffending and promote rehabilitation through community-based interventions, while also protecting the public, reducing victims and contributing to safer communities. Other priority work areas include ongoing collaboration with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) in the context of the COSLA-Police Scotland-SPA Partnership Agreement and contributing to cross-COSLA work on the National Care Service Bill, with a specific focus on Justice Social Work.

#### Social Security Highlights

COSLA facilitates collaboration between councils, the Scottish and UK Governments regarding devolved Disability Benefits and local scheme changes. Successes include advocating for unfreezing Local Housing Allowance rates by UK Chancellor and initiating data-sharing between Social Security Scotland and council software providers. However, inadequate funding for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) anticipates challenges in meeting rising demand for Crisis and Community Care Grants, hindering the SWF Action Plan's implementation in 2024/25.

#### The National Appropriate Adult Project

Initiated in 2021, the Project based within COSLA is now undergoing an evaluation during a period of staffing changes. The soon to be published

draft Annual Report 2022/2023, showcases the well-attended Nov 2023 National Event in Dundee. Upcoming priorities involve organising a similar event this year, updating the service mapping exercise, assisting in SG decision-making, and advancing training initiatives. The national project has strengthened ties with Adult Support services, Equally Safe, and Mental Health. Ongoing activities include organising forums, maintaining partnerships, and ongoing awareness initiatives. Future work with the Scottish Government will centre on maintaining momentum and ensuring appropriate funding.



#### The Equally Safe Strategy

Developed by Scottish and Local Government in 2014 we work closely with violence against women specialist organisations and many others. In December 2023 the refreshed strategy was launched. It had been informed by engaging with stakeholders across the public sector including councils and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Multi Agency Strategic Partnerships. It will be delivered through a concise Delivery Plan. This will aim to sustain efforts to prevent and eliminate VAWG across the public sector and by civic society. It also aims to support victims/survivors

and hold perpetrators to account. The Scottish and Local Government partnership is also working on the recommendations from the Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women Services. A new Board will prioritise the development of an accurate cost assessments and a new, sustainable funding model by March 2025



#### Housing and Homelessness

COSLA continues to support work on housing through the Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board and Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group co-chaired with the Minister of Housing. At the end of last year, COSLA also established the Housing Special Interest Group (SIG). The SIG was

set up to respond politically to Scotland's housing crisis, given record levels of homelessness in the country and with three councils already declaring housing emergencies. To date, two meetings of the SIG have been held which have covered housing supply issues and included external speakers from Homes for Scotland and the National Landlord Association.

#### Employability

COSLA has prioritised Employability as an area of work over the last year particularly given the focus now on No One Left Behind, along with a partnership working agreement between Scottish and Local Government. There is good evidence that the local response is proving to be effective in helping those furthest from the labour market to get access to it. The transfer of Fair Start Scotland responsibilities to councils has generated considerable work on handling case referrals from the DWP and offering reassurances. Collaboration continues with partners in the Scottish Government, Improvement Service, Local Employability Partnerships, and the Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Maureen Chalmers)



The growing prison population remains a particular concern. This rose by around nine per cent in 2023. At the end of last year the population was 7,937; as of late February, it was 7,959. While the rate of increase has slowed, the population remains too high, placing pressure on all community justice partners, including councils.

There will be a series of meetings of the SIG that will cover housing demand and other key strategic housing issues. Additionally, COSLA is developing work with GamCare as part of an early intervention approach to address homelessness with gambling harm prevention training for council staff.

An immediate issue will be the grant offer letters for the Scottish Government funded contribution to the work. Political meetings will be being sought with the newly appointed minister as we move into the next financial year.

# Innovating, Developing, Transforming

## Business Gateway

The Business Gateway Unit is a key part of COSLA, focussed on ensuring that Local Government benefits from national expertise, innovation, and support for the transformation of business support services. Not only do councils benefit from the work but so do individuals, families, communities and businesses across Scotland. COSLA’s Business Gateway Board, chaired by Cllr Gail Macgregor, oversees the service.

Business Gateway is Scotland’s national business advisory service, managed and delivered by Local Government. Its aim is to provide free personalised, accessible, and timesaving business support to businesses via 1:1 adviser support and online resources, so that they can improve at their own pace through actionable solutions and tools. Business Gateway advisers also provide links to other relevant public organisations and likeminded business owners for further support.

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### Key Work and Achievements

#### Business Support

Business Gateway is an integral part of how councils support their local economies in Scotland. Since October 2022, Business Gateway support has answered 38,769 enquiries and helped 10,068 businesses start up. One business that has benefitted is ‘Unbagged’, a secure, convenient and sustainable pick-up and drop-off for customers’ luggage - addressing a problem that many people encounter on their travels. Founded by Janani Prabhakaran in 2019, the business was forced to navigate the challenges of the pandemic that severely affected the travel industry. Looking for guidance to help the business survive, Janani approached Business Gateway for support. Through Business Gateway, Janani accessed a suite of start-up and growth business services, including one-to-one guidance from a dedicated business adviser alongside advice on her business plan and marketing. Janani also made use of Business Gateway’s range of webinars. Janani said: “Business Gateway supported me from the very beginning, and the guidance I received has helped me to better define my customer base, as well as helping to secure

funding to expand Unbagged further than Edinburgh.” You can find out more [in this video](#).

#### National Reach

Core consistency has always been a feature of the Business Gateway service, and this is achieved through a National Service Specification (NSS) and associated Programme Rules. The NSS is a framework to guide councils in the local delivery of Business Gateway and seeks to balance the need for a degree of national consistency, with the flexibility necessary for effective delivery to support local economies. An updated NSS was ratified at Leaders in November 2023, and this will come into effect from 1 April 2024.

#### Upskilling for Success

Equipping businesses with the skills and support they need to survive and thrive is a fundamental goal. Businesses all have their own unique objectives and plans, but all owners need help and support



to ensure they can achieve those. Business Gateway runs a series of daily webinars covering business essentials from How to start-up to Artificial Intelligence, designed to help people upskill and businesses grow. Since October 2022, Business Gateway has held **636** events with **21,411** attendees.

#### Collaboration in Action

Business Gateway’s impact transcends economic growth – it builds communities and fosters connections across Scotland. The business support landscape is complex and cluttered, and many find it daunting, leaving them unsure about where to start or how to take the next step. As a nationally recognised brand with a presence in every local area, Business Gateway is the ‘front door’ for many and acts with integrity to fulfil that role. Collaboration between Scottish Government, enterprise agencies and sector specific bodies including Visit Scotland is an essential part of the service’s role, to ensure businesses can access the support they need. Business Gateway is a key partner in the Business Support Partnership (BSP) and, over the past three years, has worked across several milestones as part of that programme to ensure business support is delivered more

effectively and efficiently. As a result there is now a:

- Master Customer Record pilot in progress
- Joint Marketing campaign to promote the Find Business Support website
- Joint SitRep to gather intel during the Cost of Living Business Crisis

#### Transformation

Recognising the ongoing transformation of the business support ecosystem and Business Gateway’s role within that, in 2022, the service undertook a service design project to identify what needed to be done to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This work included extensive engagement with customers to ensure that the service suits their needs. The ideas generated were validated and a programme of work spanning the next five years was identified – the *Gateway to the Future* programme. Three key programme milestones were identified. The first is almost completed. The eleven projects within that were all in keeping with the research and gap analysis done, which demonstrated that as an organisation Business Gateway should be a) assessing customer profiles over time, b) improving the customer experience of its 1:1 adviser services and c) providing a digitally enabled, scalable service.

#### Looking Forward (Cllr Gail Macgregor)



Business Gateway continues to provide support where needed by businesses, new and existing, across Scotland. The Business Gateway Board will continue to set strategic direction for the development of that service. Business Gateway continues to respond to what businesses want, as well as responding to the needs of local economies, providing more digital webinars for example. Business Gateway will continue to work with others as part of the Business Support Partnership to modernise the broader business support eco-system. Business Gateway’s own transformation programme, Gateway to the Future, continues to develop. One project within that (My Gateway) has a longer delivery timeline that means it will be a big focus for 2024 and beyond.



# Innovating, Developing, Transforming

## Digital Office

The Digital Office is hosted by COSLA and plays a vital role in supporting Scottish Local Government with the digital transformation of services. We engage in policy and strategy development, manage pan-local government digital programmes, provide technical assurance for digital programmes, facilitate capacity and capability building for councils and work in partnership with Scotland Excel to provide collaborative procurement opportunities for common digital solutions.

### Key Work and Achievements

#### National Policy and Strategy Development

**Digital Strategy for Scotland** – we are currently working with Scottish Government to prepare a progress report for the current strategy and are planning for the development of a refresh of the strategy later in the year.

**Visitor Levy** – we're hosting a workshop for councils planning the introduction of Visitor Levy to explore common solutions and approaches for implementation.

#### Programme Management of Local Government Digital Programmes

**Digital Telecare Programme** – provides strategic focus, best practice guidance, and operational support to providers across Scotland ahead of the analogue to digital switchover. There are now 48,795 digital and digital ready alarms in Scotland.



**Shared ARC Programme** – in September, we awarded a single supplier framework for a Shared Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) Platform in collaboration with 17 early adopters, Scottish Government DHAC division, and Scotland Excel. This will help accelerate the transition to digital telecare whilst providing opportunities for innovation, and better data utilisation to support early intervention and prevention. Western Isles went live at the end of 2023, and we continue to engage with others to prepare for onboarding onto the platform.

**National M365 Cross-Organisation Collaboration Programme** – this enables further collaboration between Health and Social Care Partners through Microsoft 365 software. 32 councils and 14 Territorial Health Boards, NHS National Services Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland, Scottish Government and COSLA are involved. Phase One enables Outlook calendar-sharing and Teams chat/calls. To date, 60% of participating councils are live.

**Council of the Future "To-Be" State** – working with Solace and the Improvement Service, we're establishing a common future vision for digital councils for how digital can reduce costs, improve efficiencies, improve customer experience, deliver better outcomes, and provide collaborative procurement opportunities.

#### Capacity and Capability Building for Councils

**Digital Maturity Assessment** – we re-designed our Digital Maturity Assessment to support councils in meeting their responsibilities outlined in the [Digital Strategy for Scotland](#). 26 councils are completing the pre-requisites. Five councils have tested the new online service.

**Service Design Challenge Competition** – our [Design Challenge Competition](#), in partnership with Scottish Digital Academy and Snook,

empowered councils to submit data and digitisation challenges to receive fully funded mentoring support. Out of 15 submissions, challenges from East Renfrewshire Council and Fife Council were selected to progress with initially.

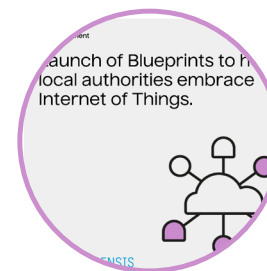
**Launch of the Data Masterclass Course** – In partnership with the Scottish Digital Academy, Scottish Government Data Division, and Perth and Kinross Council, we developed an online learning resource to build data literacy across the public sector. This resource has been made available via the Scottish Digital Academy across Local Government and wider public sector.



#### Features: Collaborative Procurement and IoT



**Collaborative Procurement for Microsoft Licences** – Following on from the success of a joint procurement exercise for Microsoft licences last year with 11 councils, Scotland Excel, and Crown Commercial Services (CCS) which saw savings just under £1m. In February 2024, five councils plus COSLA joined a second aggregated procurement which is due to conclude in March. Savings from this will be announced shortly.



**IoT Blueprints** – A series of [technology blueprints](#) have been developed to help Scotland's councils realise the potential of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to enhance the delivery of public services.

Funded by the Scottish Government, five blueprints are initially being made available to councils to highlight opportunities and potential challenges they may face when introducing new connected technologies. This initiative forms part of an ongoing collaboration between the Digital Office and Scotland's Innovation Centre, CENSIS.

#### Looking Forward (Cllr Katie Hagmann)



Following the approval of the Business Plan by Solace in September 2023, the Digital Office is actively recruiting to support its large portfolio of work. Our primary focus is on advancing the initiatives described above and continuing to equip councils with digital expertise, drive collaborative efficiency, opportunities and benefits, which will in turn benefit communities.

# Innovating, Developing, Transforming

## myjobscotland



myjobscotland.gov.uk is a recruitment website for Scottish Council jobs in Scotland. It performs a dual role in that it acts as a platform for recruitment advertising and is also an ATS (applicant tracking system) and was recognised in its infancy by the Christie Report as a significant shared service providing value for money to the public sector. The package of both these services allows councils to attract a larger pool of potential candidates (currently 1.45 million registered accounts), ensuring that their recruitment process is more accessible and efficient – providing communication, interview scheduling and contract creation in one package. It is also a cost-effective advertising medium, where all vacancies can be posted for a fixed cost per annum as opposed to traditional advertising methods which are usually pay-per-use and could cost more than 30 times the cost we currently provide it for.

### Key Work and Achievements

#### Service Improvements

Various enhancements were made to the service in 2023, including the introduction of a Career Hub, a display option to show jobs on a map, additional search filters, and automation of several councils’ onboarding processes. The team also attended a number of Careers / Apprenticeship shows across Scotland.

#### Contract Extension

The existing contract, agreed upon in May 2023, extended for two years with fees to Councils frozen at the same rates paid since 2016. The cost of the service in the 2022/23 period was £488k.

#### Strategic Review

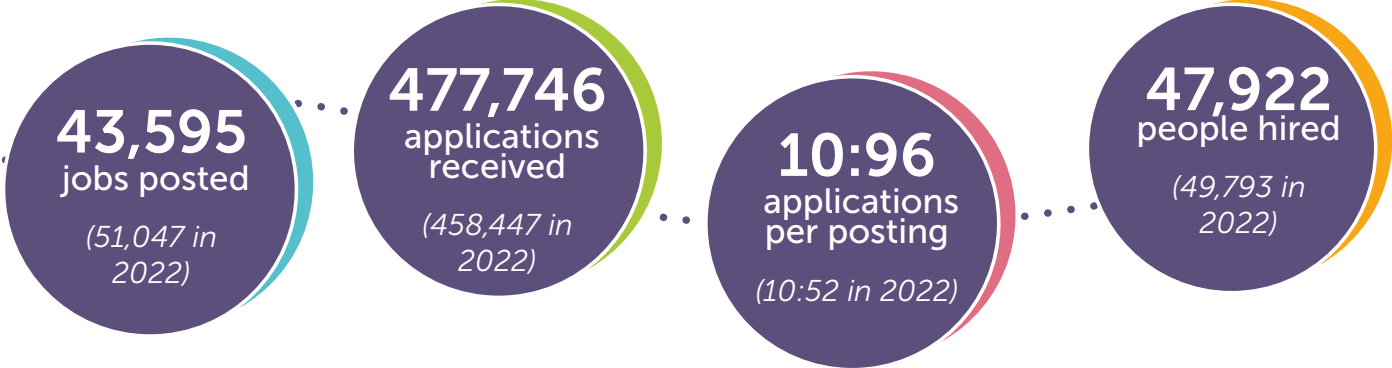
A strategic review is being undertaken to inform long-term planning and improve service delivery. The review focuses on liaising with councils to determine the key strengths of the platform, developing a high-level project plan, clarifying the purpose of myjobscotland, and promoting its scope and benefits.

#### Challenges and Solutions

Some councils have expressed dissatisfaction with certain elements of the service, mainly the ‘back office’ or applicant tracking system (ATS). This can partly be attributed to under-utilisation of the system and a lack of awareness of the total benefits of the myjobscotland offering. The last report to Leaders in February 2024 asked councils to think twice before procuring their own ATS as part of their HR systems due to potential risks to the candidate experience and increased costs. These are not just isolated to the purchase of such a system, but also the cost to implement a new system (new configuration, training of all staff), but the additional burden for the HR team to undertake in order to cope with an increased workload which is already being supplied centrally in COSLA, by the myjobscotland team.



### 2023 in Figures



The cost of the service can be expressed in three ways: (based on all councils using the service):

Cost per job advert:	Cost per application:	Cost per hire:
£11.10	£1.02	£10.18

### Summary

Through yet another difficult year for recruitment in general, we have proved our worth time and time again. We’ve delivered a service at a price that no private job board could offer, and we’ve made improvements for candidates, advertisers, members and third parties – making it easier to integrate with us, advertise with us, applying for jobs and automating the back-end processes of recruiting. There’s nothing unusual about that though – driving better-than-ever performance is a business-as-usual job for us. We always have improvements in the pipeline, but we rely on customers to tell us what they need and want, but equally that needs to be reciprocated by resource on the ground to further achieve better process efficiencies.

### Looking Forward (Cllr Katie Hagmann)



The following updates are planned for 2024:

- Front-end website design improvements and design refresh.
- Move from PayPal to Gov Pay Platform for payments (including option for Conference Centre and rest of COSLA to accept online payments).
- New Communication Centre in Talentlink for all candidate emails and scheduling.
- Addition of new candidate security options for candidates, such as strengthening our password policy (including adding in a provision for locking out the account) and looking at at least two-factor authentication.
- Enhanced Interview Scheduling for Managers and recruiters
- Continued roll out of existing and upcoming system features to increase adoption and experience for recruiters



# Innovating, Developing, Transforming

## Trading Standards Scotland (TSS)



TSS priority areas are the retrofit energy efficiency market, doorstep crime, sales of counterfeit goods and scams. TSS is also the lead agency for tackling illegal money lending in Scotland. TSS receives grant funding from the UK Government Department of Business and Trade and HM Treasury.

### Key Work and Achievements

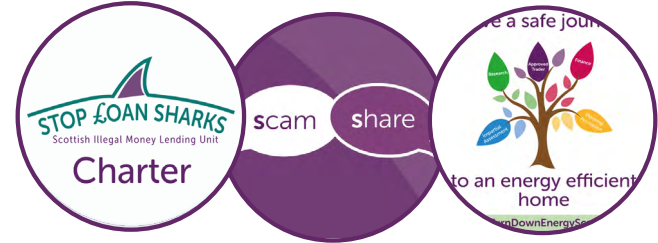
#### Project Maxwell

The retrofit energy efficiency market is an area that is difficult for consumers to navigate. If consumers do not take measure to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, it is unlikely net zero targets will be reached. The complexity and a shortage of reputable businesses in the supply chain results in opportunities for rogue traders to exploit. Under Project Maxwell TSS have developed intelligence on the key issues facing consumers, undertaken disruption and enforcement work, and designed and implemented consumer awareness campaigns with the aim of reducing consumer detriment and increasing consumer confidence to engage in this market. Additional funding was secured from Scottish Government to support this work which has fed into the development of the Heat in Buildings Bill. Having recognised a particular issue with sales of spray foam for use as loft insulation, demonstrated by a 41% rise in complaints, TSS ran a successful awareness campaign which resulted in a dramatic drop in complaints. The company responsible has been reported to Crown Office and a prosecution is pending.

#### Project Catriona

Illegal money lending, operating a consumer credit business without the appropriate authorisation, remains a concerning issue across Scotland. Over the last two years, alongside the cost-of-living crisis, TSS has recorded an increasing number of reports of active illegal lenders. As victims of illegal lenders are often too scared to provide evidence against the lenders TSS places a strong emphasis on prevention

and awareness raising work. TSS have developed the [Stop Loan Sharks Charter Mark](#) to allow partner organisations to show their support for tackling the issue, currently one council is signed up to the Charter Mark and discussions are ongoing with several more. TSS also funds community-based prevention projects, funding projects in Renfrewshire, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Dumfries and Galloway since 2022.



#### ScamShare

TSS issue a [weekly e-newsletter](#) providing consumers with information on the latest scams, how to avoid them and who to report them to. The newsletter has also allowed TSS to gather information from consumers through an annual survey, the Big Scottish Scams Survey. This is vital information on the issues that consumers are facing and allows the team to tailor the messaging and assess gaps in the reach. The team are currently developing other methods of communication including podcasts to reach younger consumers.

#### TS Policy & Coordination Group

COSLA has set up the above group to foster strategic leadership of the Trading Standards

function across Scotland, drive effective co-ordination of Trading Standards priorities between Local Government and Scottish Government, as well as across Scottish Government policy areas and to tackle recruitment and retention issues. The Group will take a collaborative approach to delivering shared priorities in the Trading Standards

policy areas, in line with the Verity House agreement. In recognition of the fact that there are similar issues facing trading standards, environmental health and other Local Government regulatory services in terms of sustainability and workforce close links are maintained with similar groups supporting those services.

### Features: Investigations and Results

TSS Fair Trading Investigations May 2022 to March 2024

Project	No. Complaints	No. Complaints Recording Contract Value	Total Contract Value	Avg. Contract Value per Complaint
FALL (itinerant doorstep crime)	328	291	£1,636,405.76	£5623.39
MAXWELL (marketing of energy efficiency measures)	404	339	£1,973,779.42	£5822.36

**Project Loch: Recorded Cost of Scams** - Payments made by consumers as a result of scams: **£2,276,613** from **1172** complaints with **339** of those complaints recording a value.

**Turn Down Energy Scams Campaign** - There was a total reach of 406,833 across all digital channels. The campaign [press release](#) was shared across 6 different press outlets / websites. Although circulation figures for these are not available, it can be estimated that at least 500,000 consumers were reached via these platforms. The [television advert](#) can be estimated to have reached at least 1 million viewers. The ScotPulse surveys reached 2,200 consumers. It can be estimated that the launch event reached at least 100 consumers. **The total reach for the 2023 campaign was 1,909,133**

#### Cases Reported to the Procurator Fiscal Service

Project Fall - 7	Project Jasper - 5	Project Maxwell - 4	Project Catriona - 2
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### Looking Forward (Cllr Maureen Chalmers)



TSS works closely with and relies on information from local authority trading standards services and Advice Direct Scotland. Over recent years there has been a drop in the number of consumer complaints logged with ADS and the number of intelligence logs submitted by local services. Local trading standards services are facing significant workforce issues and consumers may be choosing to complain in different ways. This drop in intelligence means that consumer detriment may be going unreported and problematic trading practices are not being picked up and tackled which will damage consumer confidence and impact on economic growth. We will seek to work with partners to address these issues and explore whether technology can assist in identifying consumer detriment. As the majority of consumer issues we are currently seeing are of a civil nature we will work with local trading standard services to identify how we can collectively make better use of Enterprise Act provisions.

# COSLA's Communications



The last two years have seen a determined and more strategic approach to our communications. We have engaged with and listened to our members and are endeavouring to make Local Government's voice heard in a positive, proactive and a more varied way. In a world with multiple media streams and an environment where the public sector is heavily criticised, it has been challenging but our work aims to change the narrative and improve the understanding of the critical services that Local Government delivers for our communities every day.

## Key Work and Achievements

### Media Training

Media training led by [Morrison Media](#) for COSLA's Presidential Team, Spokespersons, Senior Management Team and Chief Officers, encouraging a team ethos amongst our political team as well as building confidence in managing traditional media and social media.

### COSLA's Website

Refresh of COSLA's website, gradually adding a bank of high-quality images and videos to make it more appealing and user-friendly.

### Social Media

- A new social media strategy to improve cross-team working, increase COSLA presence on social media, ensure more consistent coverage of our spokespeople and policy areas, and improve our offering.
- Improvement of our social media posts, with more 'short-form' videos and images
- Over **19,000** followers on Twitter, **2,100** on Facebook, **2,200** on Linked In and almost **300** on Instagram.
- **#ThisIsLocalGovernment** campaign, showcasing the work of Scottish Local Government
- **Fact Friday** showcased the vast range of service provided by Councils – with a deliberate focus on some of the less obvious services.



### Elected Members' Bulletins

Over **250** Elected Members' Bulletins in the last two and a half years, regularly achieving **60% and upwards open rates** on MailChimp - significantly higher than average for Government Publications.

### Professional Network

We continue to engage with a strong professional network of media teams across all Scottish councils, as well as maintaining positive relationships with the country's print and broadcast media.

### Online Seminars

Very successful online seminar on our Budget Lobbying Campaign in December 2023 – attracting over 100 elected members.

### COSLA Excellence Awards

Successful COSLA Excellence Awards event in September as part of the Annual Conference - attracting **200 plus entries** - a record number.



### Staff Development

Monthly lunchtime staff development sessions, 'Food For Thought', on a broad range of topics with internal and guest presenters.

### Staff Magazine

Launch of the '**We Are COSLA**' staff magazine – an opportunity to share and showcase staff's broader interests as well as keep teams connected by sharing priorities and key pieces of work keeping us busy.

## Looking Forward



- Broaden and improve our **social media** across X, Facebook, Linked In, Instagram and YouTube.
- Rebrand and modernise the **Elected Members' Briefing (EMB) email**, focusing on clear, high quality content.
- Develop a series of **online seminars** to cover the work of all the Policy Teams and Spokespeople.
- Develop **new campaigns for 2024**, including:
  - '**Local Government in 60 seconds**' – a series of quick explainer audio / videos on key topics
  - Visuals / videos highlighting key work in the area of **transforming service delivery** by councils and partners.
  - '**Meet Your Councillors**' – videos / visuals introducing the work Councillors do for their local area.
- Delivery of the **2024 COSLA Conference and Excellence Awards** in September 2024



# Keeping COSLA Working



We continue to strive to achieve the maximum impact for our Member Councils, with the people, finances, infrastructure, technology, and assets we have. Over the last two and a half years, we have continued to build our business resilience and responded to a changing and increasingly dynamic operating environment. Below is a summary of the business areas that keep COSLA working efficiently and effectively, and importantly, an overview of what we need to focus on for the coming years.

## Key Work and Achievements

### Conference Centre

COSLA’s Conference Centre in Edinburgh can host meetings for groups of between 10 and 200 delegates and has returned to pre-pandemic operating levels, hosting **426 events** in 2023, up from 230 in 2022. As well as an important income stream for COSLA, the Centre hosts our in-person Governance meetings and is used by our Member Councils, as well as public, private and third sector partners.

We recently invested in a new sound system in our main Caledonian Suite in July 2023, enhancing the sound quality for hybrid meetings.

### Annual Conference and Excellence Awards

Our Annual Conference and Excellence Awards are the keynote events in the Scottish Local Government calendar, attracting all 32 Scottish Councils public, private and voluntary sector partners and an opportunity to highlight and recognise excellent work across Councils.

In September 2023, COSLA held its first in-person Annual Conference since 2019. The Conference - two days of speakers, over 30 exhibitions stands, fringe sessions, the COSLA Excellence Awards and COSLA Convention Meeting - received extremely positive feedback from delegates, exhibitors, and sponsors.

### Financial Management

COSLA strives for best practice in all finance and related areas, despite the lack of statutory compulsion that is required for most public and

private bodies. At Autumn Convention, we focus on our Annual Financial Statements for the previous financial year. Having been subject to an external independent audit, the Financial Statements are presented to Convention for approval and adoption – providing a ‘true and fair’ reflection of the previous financial year. At Spring Convention, the focus shifts to looking ahead, as the membership is asked to approve a budget for the next year.

To provide the membership with additional assurance, COSLA’s Audit Group meets quarterly to scrutinise performance against the approved budget. The Group has a wide remit, and considers areas such as risk.

All of this is underpinned on a day-to-day basis by the understanding that COSLA staff must ensure that the public pound is used in an economic, efficient, and effective manner. This is supported by clear policies, processes and lines of accountability.



### Data Protection

Since 2022, we have introduced a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Framework for use within COSLA and refreshed our Data Protection Policy. We continue to put Data Protection training at the heart of our induction process for new employees, as well as ongoing refresher sessions for existing staff

members. Since June 2022, 75 staff have received in-house induction and refresher training.

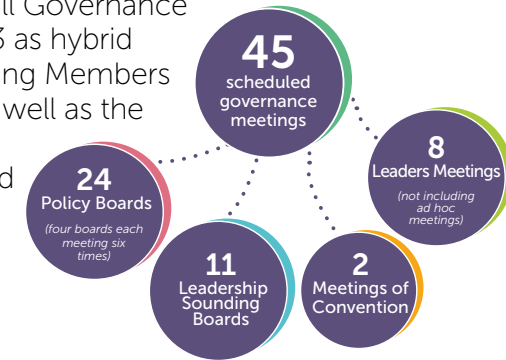
### ICT

During 2022, and after extensive background work, COSLA took the decision to outsource its ICT service to Consider IT, a small company based in Edinburgh, significantly improving our business resilience and providing support for staff in relation to systems, software and hardware. They are also supporting us to achieve ‘Cyber Essentials’ accreditation.

As you would expect, COSLA is a user of myjobscotland, recruiting to 37 jobs during 2023 through the online portal, and reaching high quality candidates from across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

### Political Governance

In November 2022, COSLA Leaders agreed that we would conduct all Governance meetings in 2023 as hybrid meetings, providing Members with flexibility, as well as the opportunity to network and build relationships. During 2023, COSLA held:



### Looking Forward

To keep COSLA working efficiently and effectively, we will

- Scope out plans for investment in visual and audio performance within 1st floor conference suites, and kitchen, catering equipment, and furniture within our Conference Centre
- Building on feedback from the 2023 Conference and Excellence awards, develop high quality 2024 keynote events for our members to enjoy and benefit from.
- Roll out ‘Sage Intacct’ during 2024, to improve financial management and reporting for all levels of management and Audit Group and increase resilience.
- Adopt the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) Accountability Framework, using the ICO’s tracker to review personal data risks and continue to develop appropriate and effective policies and procedures.
- Work with Consider IT to roll out the KnowB4 training platform to provide continuing professional development in cybersecurity, wider Information Security training as well as basic Data Protection training courses for new and existing staff.
- Continue to offer hybrid meetings in 2024, welcoming any suggestions from members on how best to facilitate governance meetings moving forward.
- Use staff survey results and engagement day feedback to drive organisational improvement, including in relation to staff wellbeing.

As well as our internal Governance meetings, COSLA also facilitates Special Interest Groups (SIG) covering Barriers to Elected Office, Housing and the cross cutting ‘Innovating, Developing, Transforming’ SIG.

### People Management

In April 2022 following a decision by COSLA Leaders, we welcomed the Digital Office to COSLA. COSLA now employs 129 staff across 13 teams and business units.

In 2023, we ran our first Staff Satisfaction survey post-COVID which showed that 72% of staff are either satisfied or very satisfied with COSLA as their employer. In 2024, that has increased to 74%.

Health and Wellbeing is important to COSLA’s management team, and a range of support is in place including an online wellbeing hub, access to occupational health when appropriate, access to West Lothian Council’s Employee Assistance Programme, and COSLA Mental Health First Aiders. Most staff benefit from hybrid working, improving work/life balance.

Since a return to the office during 2022, regular staff engagement days are held where there is an opportunity to meet our key politicians and explore how the work of all our staff impacts on COSLA’s priorities. Staff from across the organisation have been instrumental in writing the COSLA Development Plan, with actions addressing staff communication, working environment and wellbeing.






## COSLA


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Visit [www.cosla.gov.uk/about-cosla](http://www.cosla.gov.uk/about-cosla)  
to learn more about our approach, our  
decision making, and our teams

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