



COSLA

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Plan

2022-2027

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

Introduction



Council services never stop, delivering 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Councils are constantly working to provide the services that are crucial to the very fabric of our local communities and ensuring the well-being of individuals, families, and society. Councils are key to supporting local economic development and recovery, and to providing the local democratic accountability needed to ensure that services are delivered according to the needs and priorities of local people.

COSLA is the national membership organisation for Scottish Local Government. Comprising all of Scotland’s 32 councils, COSLA sets the strategic direction for Local Government to best deliver for Scotland’s communities. To do this COSLA’s staff work with a network of professional advisors and partners.

Local Government and communities continue to face unprecedented and serious challenges. This requires a robust, strategic framework to guide our work for the next few years, so this COSLA Plan sets out our vision, high-level ambitions, and priorities. We do this on behalf of all councils in Scotland, to improve the lives of people in our local communities.

our Vision



“COSLA will work relentlessly to ensure that Scottish Local Government has the powers and the resources it needs to deliver the highest quality services that enable everyone to live well locally.”



To achieve this vision, we will focus on six priorities:



our Current Context



Right now, we face a combination of social and financial challenges never seen in modern times. The current cost crisis exacerbates the threats already posed to local democracy, including years of real terms reductions in settlements, an increase in ring-fenced and directed funding, and very real threats to local services and accountability, for example those now proposed in the National Care Service Bill.

Protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities, our staff and our assets will take significant energy and resolve especially as Scottish Government has set out its intentions for the next 4 years in the 'Resource Spending Review' - Local Government will see a "flat cash" settlement, which in reality will mean cuts to services, unless we think differently about Local Government's role and services into the future.

There are many threats and challenges in our current operating context - some of which are shown in the diagram opposite. Holding onto COSLA's 5 core principles (shown in the centre of the diagram) will become all the more important in this context.



our Priorities



Over the next 5 years, COSLA's work will focus on 6 key priority areas. Below are some of the actions that we will undertake to progress these priorities - further detail of this work is set out in COSLA's Boards plans and will regularly be updated and shared with our key stakeholders and partners.

In order to achieve the outcomes we seek, COSLA will enhance and broaden the scope of our partnership working arrangements, strengthen our existing links with professional associations, and initiate shared programmes of work aimed at enabling transformation for our member councils across Scotland.



Strengthen Local Democracy



Through a renewed relationship with Scottish Government, based on trust and mutual respect, Local Government is empowered to lead and act to ensure local democracy in Scotland delivers effective and inclusive representation of the range of needs and views expressed by our diverse communities.

Why?

Democracy matters, and nowhere more so than at the local level. It enables every person to be able to express their views and embrace their rights in a fair and just society. That is why individuals and communities must be empowered through strong local democratic decision-making processes and be engaged and involved. A well-functioning relationship between Scottish Local Government and the Scottish Government that is based on subsidiarity and recognises the sovereignty of people is essential to delivering better outcomes.

We Will:

- Secure the adoption of the European Charter for Local Self-Government in Scots Law.
- Re-establish an open, honest, and functioning, trusted local and central government relationship.
- Strengthen and rebalance the relationship between Local Government and the people of Scotland and ensure subsidiarity.
- Work with Scottish Government to re-establish and complete the Local Governance Review.
- Continue our work to tackle barriers to elected office for under-represented groups, to ensure elected members are representative of the communities that they serve.
- Support the work toward enabling all communities to be able to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and their communities.

Secure Sustainable Funding



In order that communities continue to get the support and high-quality services they need, we will work to ensure that Local Government is funded fairly and has multi-year financial settlements. This would mean more certainty for not only our workforce but for our communities and the services they rely on every day.

Why?

The constant cycle of single year budgets, and annual cycle of justifying why Local Government requires investment is exhausting for everyone – for our councillors, for our senior managers, for our staff on the front line who are continually being faced with savings targets, and for our communities who see the core service that they rely on being cut back each year. We want Local Government to be enabled to take a strategic and long-term approach to budgets that focuses on prevention – this would save valuable resource across the whole of the public sector. Importantly, this would also support councils to recruit, retain, and invest in their workforce as Fair Work employers.

We Will:

- Enable a focus on **person-centred, outcomes-focused services** by developing a 'fiscal framework' – the funding rules between Scottish and Local Government that create certainty, stability and transparency and allow investment in Local Government's workforce, services, and communities across Scotland
- Explore and develop a range of options for councils to be **more fiscally empowered**, reducing reliance on Scottish Government grant and allowing our members to focus spend on what matters locally.

Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families & Communities



Local Government develops sustainable outcome-focused services with support for wellbeing at the core. Any services provided by the National Care Service are subject to local democratic control, enhance local outcomes and focus on the needs of local people.

Why?

Social care and social work are vital to our communities; and local authorities are at the heart of the design and delivery of these services. The proposal to remove the staff functions and assets in these from Local Government to a National Care Service with accountability to Ministers will have a significant and detrimental impact on locally designed services that meet the needs of the very different communities across Scotland. We cannot wait for a National Care Service which is focussed on structural change at the expense of investment in our social care and social work services now when the system is already under severe pressure.

We Will:

- Influence the passage of the National Care Service Bill to ensure that staff functions and assets remain within Local Government and thus subject to vital local democratic accountability.
- Continue to argue for investment into Local Government in order to support the delivery of a rights-based, preventative approach to health and social care.
- Work at pace to improve the support for the social work and social care workforces.
- Continue to take forward and develop the Joint Statement of intent with a focus on Fair Work and ethical commissioning.

Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy



In line with the principles of a 'just transition', Local Government makes a meaningful contribution to the 2030 climate change target and is a key leader and driver of local economies.

Why?

The imperative to transition to a net zero economy is a direct response to worsening climate change. It requires fundamental change to many aspects of the economy and society over the next two decades and more, which will need to be delivered in as fair a way as possible. This priority also recognises that there is an economic and societal benefit of taking action on climate change, and that inaction will lead to worse outcomes, including increasing levels of poverty.

We Will:

- Work with Scottish Government and our Local Government partners to ensure just transition is well coordinated at the national level.
- Focus on those high carbon sectors which have the strongest connection to the economy and society e.g. transport and heat.
- Argue for greater investment in Local Government which can be used to fund local net zero projects and programmes.
- Work in partnership to deliver a streamlined and more effective business support landscape;
- Work in partnership to develop and deliver the actions within the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

Enhance Education & Support for our Children & Young People



Local Government secures the best education for all our children and young people and provides wider learning and support while tackling poverty and social inequality.

Why?

Local Government sets the conditions which support our children and young people to grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding, enhancing their life chances through our early years provision, education and by supporting families when they need it. We include children and families in decisions about their lives and protect their rights, dignity, and wellbeing. Schools and learning environments are loving, respectful and encouraging and everyone can learn, play, and flourish. Children and young people have hope for the future and opportunities to fulfil their dreams.

We Will:

Have at the forefront of our minds the social inequality and factors which mean children and young people do not have an equal starting point in life. We will do this by ensuring Local Government remains directly responsible and accountable for services and supporting the changes and improvements necessary to their:

- Learning opportunities – supporting children and young people to achieve the best possible educational outcomes, including working to close the poverty-related attainment gap, and improving the overall standards of attainment which have been impacted by the effects of the Covid pandemic.
- Care and wellbeing – Keeping the Promise Scotland made to care experienced infants, children, young people, adults, and their families, and supporting all children and young people's mental and physical health.
- Rights and protection – Making sure that children's rights are protected, supporting incorporation of UNCRC into Scots law, and keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm.

Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities



Local Government supports individuals and families through focussing on the realisation of human rights and tackling poverty and inequalities, particularly where the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Cost-of-Living crisis is impacting negatively on their life opportunities and chances.

Why?

Everyone should have access to sufficient food, clothing, and housing, and warmth, and we should strive for continuous improvement in living conditions for those who are most marginalised. In order for those most vulnerable in society to be part of healthy and happy communities, we must nurture and protect our local resources, environments and all who live in them. Local Government plays a central role in this regard and by working in partnership with colleagues across the public and third sector, we can support and empower those who are at most risk of exclusion and poverty.

We Will:

- Work to ensure that councils are empowered and resourced to maximise their role in preventing poverty.
- Support Local Government's work on strengthening employability services to help those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market.
- Work with partners to develop policies which reduce homelessness and improve access to quality housing.
- Work with councils in their delivery of benefits and financial support, and to develop further the relationship with Social Security Scotland.
- Drive the system changes needed to realise the human rights of all those living in our communities.
- Proactively shape and deliver programmes which support people who are seeking sanctuary in the UK, and work to address the risks of exclusion and destitution faced by migrants.
- Support and strengthen the community justice model to safely reduce offending, while ensuring that we protect, support, and improve outcomes for victims and witnesses of crime.
- Work to strengthen, support, and promote community wellbeing through broadening sport, leisure, and cultural access.




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