

Employability Strategic Plan 2024-27 update

Summary and Recommendations

This paper provides the Board with an update on the joint Employability Strategic Plan 2024-27, which is currently in development between Local and Scottish Government at officer level. The aim of the Strategic Plan is to set out the role of employability in relation to the wider policy landscape, taking account of changes (such as the ending of Fair Start Scotland referrals in March 2024) and progress on NOLB since 2018.

Board Members are invited to:

- i. Provide comments on the high-level overview of the planned approach to the Strategic Plan 2024-27.
- ii. Provide a steer on the overarching priorities jointly identified by Local and Scottish Government: tackling child poverty, closing the disability employment gap; strengthening Local Employability Partnerships; and alignment with the wider Fair Work agenda.

References

- 23-10-20 CWB Board item 5.1 Employability: Joint COSLA-SG position paper on No One Left Behind

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Employability: Joint COSLA-SG position paper on No One Left Behind

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Board with an update on the joint Employability Strategic Plan 2024-27, which is currently in development between Local and Scottish Government at officer level. This paper asks Board members for comments and a steer on the high-level approach for the plan.

Current Position

2. Local Government and Scottish Government have a mutual commitment to the delivery of employability support through No One Left Behind (NOLB), as outlined by the Partnership Working Agreement on Employability agreed in December 2018.
3. In July 2023 Cllr Chalmers met with the then Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy, Neil Gray MSP, to discuss progress on NOLB since 2019 and the potential for multi-annual funding for employability.
4. A shared COSLA-Scottish Government position paper on NOLB was approved at the COSLA Community Wellbeing Board meeting in October 2023. This paper was developed in light of the Verity House Agreement. It sets out three shared priorities for Local and Scottish Government:
 - a focus on evidence-based improvement;
 - the scaling up of employability support for parents; and
 - collective Local Government-Scottish Government oversight of employability services.
5. Employability remains a key priority for Local Government, with the significant contribution that employability makes to wider strategic policy challenges such as
 - Fair work,
 - tackling child poverty,
 - closing the disability employment gap, and
 - improving health outcomes for individuals and communities.
6. Furthermore, the contribution that employability services delivered locally through the place-based approach of NOLB make to national economic development remains a shared priority for Local and Scottish Government, as outlined in the National Strategic for Economic Transformation (Project 15: Eradicate Structural Barriers to Participating in the Labour Market).
7. Later this month, as part of ongoing Ministerial engagement on employability, Cllr Chalmers is due to meet with Gillian Martin MSP in her new role as Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work. Arrangements for this meeting are being finalised, but points for discussion may cover: an update of the Partnership Working Agreement on Employability; progress towards multi-annual funding; and shared priorities for 2024/25.

What is changing?

8. A joint Strategic Plan for 2024-27 is currently being co-developed by COSLA, Scottish Government, Improvement Service and the SLAED People Group. Following recent discussions between COSLA and Scottish Government, the publication date for this plan has been pushed back to June 2024 to allow for wider engagement with Local Government and to ensure that Community Wellbeing Board is able to approve the final draft of the plan before summer recess.
9. The aim of the Strategic Plan is to set out the role of employability in relation to the wider policy landscape, taking account of changes (such as the ending of Fair Start Scotland referrals in March 2024) and progress on NOLB since 2018.
10. The intention is for the plan to highlight good practice from across the 32 local authority areas, highlight emerging priorities that will influence future delivery and set out actions focused on continuous improvement.
11. In the initial drafting of the plan, the Scottish Government identified tackling child poverty and closing the disability employment gap as overarching priorities for the period of 2024-27. In consultation with the SLAED People Executive Group, the steer from local authority employability leads is that alignment with the wider Fair Work agenda should be more clearly reflected in the body of the plan, as should prioritising the strengthening of Local Employability Partnerships.
12. The actions within the Strategic Plan will also reflect other drivers of policy and practice in employability. These include:
 - the need to increase uptake and awareness of services;
 - identifying and addressing local need through strong Local Employability Partnerships;
 - working within the context of Just Transition to Net Zero; and
 - greater partnership working with Health.

Proposed COSLA Position

13. Board members are asked for comments on the high-level overview of the planned approach to the Strategic Plan 2024-27.
14. Board members are also asked for a steer on the three overarching priorities jointly identified by Local and Scottish Government: tackling child poverty, closing the disability employment gap and alignment with the wider Fair Work agenda. Specifically, Board members are asked if these are the right priorities and for comment on potential additions or changes.


Next Steps

15. Informed by Board members comments, COSLA will continue to work on the development of the Strategic Plan in partnership with Scottish Government, Improvement Service and the SLAED People Group.
16. It is intended that the final draft of the Strategic Plan will include a joint foreword from Cllr Chalmers as Community Wellbeing Spokesperson and Gillian Martin MSP as Minister for Energy, Just Transition and Fair Work.
17. The final draft of the Strategic Plan will be brought to the June meeting of the Community Wellbeing Board for approval, alongside Scottish Government Ministerial sign off procedures, with publication planned for before the summer recess.

18. Once published, the Strategic Plan will be jointly reviewed by Local and Scottish Government on an annual basis and updated as necessary, with updates brought to future Community Wellbeing Board meetings for comment and approval.

Date considered: April 2024

Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

COSLA Plan 22-27	Priority Areas	
	Strengthen Local Democracy	
	Secure Sustainable Funding	
	Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities	√
	Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People	
	Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	
	Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities	√
Verity House Agreement	Shared Priorities	
	Tackling Poverty	√
	Just transition to net zero	
	Sustainable Public Services	√