

Blueprint for Local Government

Scotland's
Councils

#EssentialEveryday

Local Government is continuing to meet the challenges brought by the pandemic, while also re-building around an ambitious vision for Scotland's future - one based on the empowerment of people and communities.

Local Government is the anchor in our communities and our most vulnerable groups; for children, young people and families; for the elderly and those needing extra support; for local businesses; for those needing help with housing; and for the services that protect and improve our physical and emotional well-being and the environment. We work with diverse communities and local organisations every day to bring about change, to respect human rights and equalities, to embed local democracy and to make the voices of people heard.

The value of Local Government can be seen in our response to COVID-19, where Councils have taken decisive action to protect and support communities, people, and businesses. Whether delivering food or medicine, providing shelter for the homeless, supporting volunteers or keeping many essential services running, Local Government has been the face of the response for many. The Local Government workforce, which is the largest in Scotland, has adapted to reduce the disruption caused by the pandemic to everyday life.



Local Government is at the forefront of the recovery and renewal process. However, we must be empowered to bring about the change we now need. The financial impacts of COVID-19 have been severe and have placed extreme pressure on already strained budgets and on our workforce. Without proper resourcing we will see reductions in spending and inevitable cuts to services, furthering the inequalities exposed by the pandemic and putting at risk the very recovery we seek.

Local Government, and the communities we serve, have shown the innovation and the creative thinking needed to respond to this unprecedented pandemic and to adapt to a new way of life. Our local knowledge and experience, building on a place-based approach, will now lead Scotland's recovery and renewal.

Strengthening Local Democracy



Decisions about our future should be made by the people most affected by them. Scotland is a diverse country: what works in our cities may not suit remote rural communities, just as the priorities in our towns may not be the same as those on our islands. Countries with truly empowered councils and communities have been shown to produce better outcomes and to be more effective at protecting and improving wellbeing.

We want a vibrant, equal democracy where people can embrace their rights, and actively participate in civic society. Working together we can create a society where everyone is valued, treated with dignity and respect, with equitable access to opportunities and a sustainable quality of life. This can only be achieved by listening to and involving people and communities. Local Government fully understands the importance of working side by side with communities and the challenges to be faced to ensure equity of involvement.

That is why we are clear that recovery should empower individuals and communities through the strengthening of local democratic decision making. To put it simply – decisions should be made from the community up, not from the top down. In making the voice of local people heard and acted upon across all public services, we can address the huge health, social and financial costs of persistent inequality in this country. We also recognise that engaging a representative group from across our communities can be difficult and that we need to be realistic about the work and time involved in ensuring that the voice of people heard is reflective of the wider community.

We have seen throughout the pandemic what can be achieved when Local Government and communities come together – now is the time to maintain and build on this. Communities hold the answers to the issues they face, and Local Government stands as the enabling force empowering communities to drive forward a transformative collaborative programme of social, economic and environmental renewal.

Crucial to this is removing the barriers that exist to elected office so that more people from across all parts of our local communities can stand for election to represent the interests of their communities.

There has been considerable progress in developing innovative approaches to community empowerment in recent years with significant interest and learning from approaches such as participatory budgeting, place-based policy making and community wealth building. To realise the potential of such approaches, we need to strengthen the structure, functions, and democratic arrangements for local democracy in Scotland, building on the key recommendations put forward by the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy and in COSLA's submission to the Local Governance Review.

This must include the adoption of the European Charter for Local Self Government – which guarantees the political, administrative and financial independence of Local Government – and empowering Local Government with new powers to raise and set taxes and to make spending decisions based on the priorities of communities.

Our Offer

An empowered Local Government will represent the diverse voices of communities and include them in the decision-making for Scotland's recovery and renewal.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- An empowered Local Government with powers to raise and set taxes and to make decisions based on the priorities and needs of local people.
- Decisions that are taken as close to communities as possible.
- The European Charter of Local Self-Government to be adopted in Scotland.
- All communities to be able to participate in the decision-making process that affects their lives and their communities.

Funding Services and Communities



COVID-19 has brought many financial challenges to Local Government as we respond to the impact of the virus, continue to protect communities, and create and provide new services.

The ambition of Local Government is to drive forward an inclusive and sustainable recovery for Scotland. To do this, we must be able to invest in essential services and in local economies. This is not possible if Councils are not properly funded and continue to face pressures to find significant savings to balance their significantly compromised books, which are under excessive strain following years of successive cuts.

Before the pandemic, Local Government was already dealing with significant financial challenges. Councils are now facing considerable additional costs, with the financial pressures for 20/21 currently estimated at £500m. This has immediate and long-term implications for Local Government's ability to both manage the financial impacts of COVID-19 and continue to deliver essential services. That is why fair funding for Local Government must be a central priority for Scotland.

It is also vital that diverse communities have a say on financial decisions relating to the services they use. That is why Local Government has long called for a Fiscal Framework to re-define its role in Scotland and its relationship with the communities it serves. The Scottish Government has recognised this and, as part of the 2020/21 Scottish Budget, committed to exploring a Fiscal Framework with Local Government.

The impact of the virus has been felt disproportionately by our most vulnerable groups. This, alongside the wider impact on communities and businesses, serves only to re-enforce the need for this to be established as quickly as possible. This will enable Local Government, with the right resources and flexibility, to address economic recovery over the longer term.

Locally driven action will be key to ensuring that the economy recovers in a way that avoids widening the inequalities we have seen across the country and which supports local business, especially SMEs. Local Government plays an important role in local economies through the employment of about 240,000

individuals, all spending money with local business, and is the largest employer in many areas of Scotland.

This role will become even more important, as if expected, we see an increase in the amount of redundancies, with Councils being well-placed to employ local people and, in turn, support economic recovery. In order to tackle inequality and drive social and economic recovery at a local level, Councils must continue to deliver the high-quality essential services, through a skilled and well-developed workforce, that Scotland relies on and needs.

Our Offer

A fairly funded Local Government will build resilient and sustainable communities in the recovery from COVID-19.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- Fair funding for Local Government.
- A Fiscal Framework for Local Government.
- Longer-term certainty in relation to budgets, allowing a focus on early intervention, prevention and transformation.
- Removal of a cap on Council Tax so that this is a truly local tax.
- More powers for discretionary taxation.

Wellbeing- Including Health and Social Care



Scotland's health and social care system has been severely tested by Covid-19. We must now address the issues that are impacting on our health and social care services. Local Government supports the health and wellbeing of people throughout their lives and we are central to how we now re-build.

The pandemic has increased awareness of the role of social care in our society and recognition of the work carried out by care workers, including unpaid carers, and social workers. This has raised important questions about how society values and appropriately pays social care workers. It has also brought into focus the daily challenges they experience and the immediate financial pressures facing the sector.

Discussion on the future of social care has centred on the potential creation of a National Care Service. This can mean many different things to different people. Moving towards a National Care Service should not be merely accepted as the necessary means of reform without proper consideration of its scope, resourcing and, vitally, its implications for local decision making. Any National Care Service must be locally empowered, reflect the needs of our communities and recognise the vital role of the third sector. It must be outcome focussed with the principle of addressing health inequalities at its core, ensure that social care is on an even playing field and address the financial challenges facing the sector. This can only be achieved by Local Government that is rooted in the community and employs local people.

Crucial to recovery is the need to bring communities and partners with us in change and to strengthen their role in it. We must ensure our approach to health and social care empowers people, is focused on equitable outcomes, supports closer integration and shifts towards prevention. Key to prevention is improvement and investment across the social determinants of health which are a central part of Local Government's role. We must also take on board the lessons of COVID-19 and embrace the gains that have been made in how we use technology and data to deliver care.

Reforming how we deliver our health and social care services offers an opportunity to change our focus from treating illness to one that positions health and social care as part of a wider approach to improving public health and community wellbeing.

Our health is determined by the conditions in which we are born, grow, age, live and work. Local Government reaches into all aspects of our lives and is central to leading and delivering improvement across the social determinants of health, including housing, education, environment, employment, social support and access to health and care services.

We also remain fully committed to the reform of public health as a central tenet of our recovery and renewal ambitions and recognise that a strong and effective relationship between Public Health Scotland and Local Government will be vital to improving and protecting community wellbeing.

Our Offer

Local Government will work to re-build an equitable health and social care system that is sustainable for the future and focused on outcomes.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- Local Government to be at the centre of the reform of health and social care.
- A funding model for health and social care that accounts for our new financial realities, with Local Government equal partners in determining the resources required.
- The acceleration of the integration of health and social care - with local democratic oversight and community engagement strengthened, particularly with those vulnerable populations such as migrants and BAME groups whose differential public health outcomes have been starkly highlighted by the pandemic.
- Public health reform must progress to deliver support for Local Government to bring about a recovery that tackles poverty, intersectional inequality and enhances community wellbeing.



Argyll &
Bute Council

Council-operated Oban Airport is providing safety support to a trial delivering vital medical supplies between Lorn and Islands District General Hospital, in Oban, and Mull and Iona Community Hospital, Craignure, Isle of Mull. Read more [here](#).

East Lothian
Council

East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (ELHSCP) has launched a phone line for people struggling with anxiety, depression or low mood during the COVID-19 lockdown. Read more [here](#).

Children, Young People and Education



Local Government responded at pace to the most challenging of circumstances, including delivering free school meals to vulnerable families, with Councils working tirelessly to ensure the safe re-opening of our schools.

However, the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people cannot be underestimated. It is crucial that that we drive a recovery and renewal process that invests in and supports children, young people and families, including those who have the greatest number of barriers placed in their way due to poverty and social inequality.

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) is the right approach to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. However, its ambitions can only be met through effective partnership working, empowering local decision making and by involving and engaging children and young people in decision making and oversight from the outset.

We must also continue to focus our efforts to address the attainment gap, ensuring that every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed. Local Government is uniquely placed to bring together the local services to bridge this gap. This includes our work with schools, but reaches into work on the economy, increasing affordable housing, public health, public transport as well as maintaining access to leisure activities and youth work services.

Effective digital connectivity is increasingly important in ensuring that children and young people have access to learning at all times. Despite welcome investment from the Scottish Government to reduce digital exclusion, significant infrastructure issues remain in terms of connectivity, as well as ongoing issues with a lack of access to devices; data and key digital and cyber skills.

Whilst the pandemic has shown the resilience of both families and communities, there is little doubt that there will be greater levels of demand for the core services that Local Government provides moving forward. Social work, family support, services for looked after children and child protection are just a few examples of the services that need to be supported and resourced to ensure they are able to cope with demand.

Our Offer

Local Government will work to identify the opportunities to ensure our children and young people get the very best education, wider learning and support that can be offered, with a clear focus on tackling poverty and social inequality.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- Education and children's services that are fully funded, and where the growing trend of ringfencing is reversed to deliver solutions which work best locally.
- Decisions that are taken locally to direct resources where they are most needed.
- The participation of children and young people to be at the forefront of recovery and renewal and how we design and deliver services moving forward.
- Expansion of the digital learning offer to ensure that all children and young people have access to learning at all times.



City of
Edinburgh
Council

Advice and support for young people and their families in Edinburgh who may be struggling at home during the pandemic is available from the City of Edinburgh Council's team of educational psychologists. Read more [here](#).

Economy and the Environment



The economic consequences of COVID-19 have been severe and have impacted on all sectors of the economy. Local Government has supported local economies throughout the pandemic. For example, through providing grant support directly and channelling grant support from Scottish Government to local SMEs as well as advice and guidance, and through repurposing employability programmes.

The type of economic recovery we now pursue will lay the foundation for future generations. Local Government spends, plans, regulates, connects, educates, supports and trains - and stands at the very heart of this economic recovery. Local Government is vital to business and has worked tirelessly to ensure that businesses could continue functioning during the pandemic. We are now providing guidance and support about how businesses can reopen safely and are supporting their ambitions and potential to grow, including the opportunities offered through the advancement of a green economy.

We also have an opportunity to be bold and to fundamentally re-think our traditional economic priorities, including how we measure economic success, away from purely monetary and financial indicators to an economy which has wellbeing at its heart. The National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals provide a basis to do this.

The emerging picture is of contrasting challenges facing communities across Scotland. COVID-19 clearly exposed the differing economic and social impacts on different groups within our society, specifically women, BAME Communities, young people who are more likely to be working in sectors such as hospitality; tourism and the "gig economy", plus older people who are more likely to be affected in returning to the workforce as they currently remain at higher risk from COVID-19.

Differing solutions to these impacts will be required in different parts of the country and that is why the recovery must be centred on people and place if it is to succeed in delivering long term. A place-based recovery and the consideration of approaches, such as community wealth building, is central not just to a recovery from COVID-19 but to unlocking the economic potential of communities and delivering the ambition of a green, sustainable and inclusive economy.

The impact of Brexit cannot be ignored. There will be huge implications for Local Government, including with respect to economic development and on our workforce, particularly in vital areas such as social care. Even more so now, in these times of economic uncertainty, it is imperative that communities across Scotland are prepared for any eventuality.

We must also be aware that climate change poses a greater threat than COVID-19, and that we cannot make the choice between the economy and the environment, whilst recognising the challenge of delivering on local climate change strategies and commitments at a time of significant resource pressure. There is limited timeframe for local action on climate change and that is why we require a new economic model, one which can deliver the improvement needed whilst delivering fair and sustained growth. Councils are investing in a greener future, but a new dialogue is needed where all partners are equally engaged in this aim.

Our Offer

Local Government will lead a response that is tailored to the needs of different people and places and which reach across all communities.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- A targeted approach to sectors of the economy which are crucial to achieving our long-term goals of achieving a net zero carbon and inclusive economy.
- Connectivity, including transport and digital connectivity, will be vital and investment in infrastructure will be central to building a more resilient economy.
- A recovery response that is place-based and which reflects the fact that economic impacts will not be felt equally across society and the economy.
- The powers and financial support to enable Local Government delivers a strong “return on investment” for local economies.



Falkirk Council's [Employment & Training Unit \(ETU\)](#) has ensured more than 800 people continue to gain employability skills during lockdown by adapting how it delivers its services. Read more [here](#).

Supporting Vulnerable Communities



Local Government has worked tirelessly with diverse communities and local partners, including in the third sector, to provide emergency food, medicine and financial and wellbeing support. For example, during lockdown, rough sleeping was effectively eliminated through effective partnership working.

However, COVID-19 has also reinforced and exposed more sharply the nature of inequality - with people who are more deprived at greater risk of becoming infected and, because of poorer underlying health, more vulnerable to serious disease. This only emphasises the importance of reducing deprivation and inequalities in our society and across diverse communities of people, including within Black, Asian or minority ethnic groups.

The impacts of the crisis have not been felt equally. Groups, and parts of Scotland, facing poverty, inequality and other social harms have felt the impact of the pandemic more than others and there are now higher numbers of people experiencing poverty, who are food insecure, income insecure, and at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Without purposeful intervention, we will see deepening inequalities, especially for those who are most marginalised and experience multiple discriminations.

It is important we lead a recovery that tackles these inequalities and builds on our experiences over the past few months and the powerful examples of community empowerment, agile service delivery and strong partnership working that has been demonstrated across Local Government and communities.

To do this, Local Government must have the flexibilities, support, and resources necessary to protect essential frontline services and to power wider services and supports needed. This will mean strengthening investment in affordable housing, driving an economic recovery focused on wellbeing and ensuring fairness in our social security systems as well as in our schools, nurseries and social sector and the community infrastructure that is necessary to work effectively together. This will enable us to respond to the needs of our most marginalised people.

The expected rise in the prison population when the courts resume their work will also place immense pressures on the Justice system in the months ahead. Scotland's high level of imprisonment is to some extent a symptom of the endemic poverty and deprivation in our society. In addition to tackling disadvantage, we must now take forward work in the youth and community justice systems to avoid us returning to the expensive option of having even higher secure unit and prisoner rates over the coming years.

Councils have referred to the joint COSLA and Scottish Government COVID-19 [Framework](#) advising a focus on supporting members of the Gypsy/Traveller community to safely stay on sites or other temporary locations throughout the pandemic. Councils have recognised the additional vulnerabilities placed on members of the community by the pandemic and have responded by transforming the framework into effective operational practice. This approach has resulted in appropriate sanitation provision, informed access to support in local areas and has provided a level of security against eviction from temporary encampments.

Our Offer

Local Government will take a lead role in supporting a fair and inclusive recovery with a strong focus on supporting the realisation of human rights, tackling poverty and addressing intersectional inequalities.



What is Needed to Achieve this Vision

- Action to build on the strengths and assets of our diverse communities, maximising the capabilities already available in our local places and strengthening local leadership and participatory democracy.
- Good quality homes for everyone in Scotland, preventing a return to homelessness and rough sleeping and providing sustainable places to live within connected communities.
- A social safety net below which no one should fall and routes to good quality, sustainable employment.
- Concerted effort to empower the most marginalised groups and those at risk of being excluded or left behind and to address the gendered effects of the pandemic.



Scotland's
Councils

Local Authorities across Scotland provided rapid response to accommodation and financial needs of vulnerable people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) who were not permitted or unable to access mainstream safety nets. By implementing a framework produced by COSLA, Local Authorities maximised the use of their statutory powers and coordinated with third sector partners to effectively safeguard some of the most vulnerable people with NRPF. Read more [here](#).

Aberdeen
City Council

An innovative app launched by Aberdeen City Council last year has taken on additional importance in the current pandemic lockdown. The app means that young people can maintain contact with the social work professionals who support them and their families. Read more [here](#).