

# Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

## 3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6)

Tuesday 7 September 2021

## Priorities for Session 6 – COSLA

### Introduction

1. At its meeting on 29 June 2021, the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee agreed to hear from COSLA as a key stakeholder working within the areas covered by the Committee's remit as part of its exploration of priorities over the coming session. It also agreed to explore with COSLA themes related to the Scottish Government's budget for 2022/23.
2. Ahead of the evidence session, the Committee wrote to COSLA seeking details of its work and priorities in the coming years.
  - [Letter from the Convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee to various stakeholders – 1 July 2021](#)
3. The response is provided at **Annexe A**.

### Meeting

4. At the meeting, the Committee will have the opportunity to hear more about COSLA's priorities from:
  - Councillor Alison Evison, President COSLA
  - Councillor Gail Macgregor, Resources Spokesperson, COSLA

### Clerk to the Committee

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee



## COSLA Response: Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee Summer 2021

This paper comprises a response from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to the following request from the Scottish Parliament Local Government, housing and Planning Committee.

*“The Committee has agreed to seek views from stakeholders over the summer recess on your priorities within the Committee’s remit, including the financial implications for local government, planning and housing of the continuing pandemic. The Committee is especially keen to hear of examples of innovative practices arising from necessity over the last 18 months which should continue beyond the pandemic. This information will inform the Committee’s approach to consideration of the Scottish Government budget later in the year”.*

### Introduction

1. COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide written views to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee in response to the above request. Local Government covers a huge range of services, many of which are covered more specifically by other Scottish Parliamentary Committees. We understand that the remit of the Committee is to consider and report on matters relating to Local Government, housing and planning and this response considers this in its fullest sense. In the interest of joined up working, much of the information provided in this response has been/may also be shared with other Committees upon request at various times.
2. Key to COSLA’s priorities for the recovery period are those set out in the COSLA Blueprint for Local Government<sup>1</sup>. The Blueprint is framed around 6 key themes: Strengthening Local Democracy, Funding Services and Communities, Wellbeing – Including Health and Social Care, Education and Children and Young People, Economy and the Environment and Supporting Vulnerable Communities. Although not exhaustive, the following response sets out more detail regarding the work, goals and priorities across a broader but interrelated range of specific areas of interest to the Committee; these areas, among others, provide the focus for work across COSLA. Further information on any specific area highlighted in this document can be provided as is required by the committee.
3. The Committee may wish to be aware that COSLA and the Improvement Service work within a formal partnership arrangement. This is embodied by a commitment to working together – in synergy with the Improvement Service’s four strategic priorities<sup>2</sup> – in the interests of our members and their priorities, where it is appropriate and sensible to do so, and where collaborative gain will be derived for Scottish Local Government. The agreement covers a range of joint priority areas of which some are included below and will be apparent from our responses to the Committee’s request.

### Local Government Finance

4. Financial view on the priorities outlined in the Committee’s remit

The following section sets out COSLA's financial perspective relating to the priorities outlined in the correspondence recently issued by the Committee.

- *Local Governance Review and Local Democracy Bill* – COSLA already have a commitment from Scottish Government for the development of a Fiscal Framework (one part of the Local Governance Review), although progress to this point has been slow. We are particularly interested in learning how this ongoing work links to the commitment from the Scottish Government relating to the development of a “Citizen’s Assembly to consider the way forward on Council Tax alongside the question of wider powers for Local Government”. The committee will be aware that a significant volume of work has already been carried out on Council Tax and as such further clarity is required. We also note that the Fiscal Framework between the UK and Scottish Government is currently being reviewed. Many of the concepts are similar to that of the framework between the Scottish Government and Local Government and should be considered along similar lines to ensure consistency, fairness, equality, and maximum flexibility.
- *Funding formula for local government* – we need to define what is meant by this and whether we are looking at the way Local Government is funded i.e. distribution; GAE; settlement/budget process. It would be good to understand the particular aspect the Convener is interested in. The main point for Scottish Government to act on is that the way in which Local Government is currently funded, through annual grant allocations, often announced late in the preceding financial year, does not allow a long-term focus on outcomes or the best use of scarce financial resources. Funding announcements tend to include the additional funding required to deliver Scottish Government policy priorities, and as a result, real terms reductions to Local Government’s core budget are inhibiting Councils’ ability to maximise their role in relation to addressing the wider social determinate of health and well-being i.e. housing, income, and employment etc. This in turn this is creating pressures within NHS acute service. We need to break this cycle and fully recognise Local Government’s essential role. There needs to be fair funding in the Scottish Budget to Local Government. Whilst understandably there has been focus on the role of the NHS in dealing with the pandemic, with the promise of significant levels of investment, this must not come at the cost of critical services which Local Government needs to provide in recovery. There needs to be a whole system think about health and wellbeing across the public sector. The key social determinants of health, including education, housing, and employment, are all drivers behind long term positive health outcomes, but must be invested in to improve health outcomes and address health inequality.
- *Community Wealth* – as large spenders across all local economies, the scope is huge to drive significant benefits into communities and local supply chains. However, this can only be achieved with adequate financial resources otherwise there is a wider (negative) impact on local economies. Investment in infrastructure, alongside investment in services, needs to be at the forefront of the Scottish Government’s thinking on the Scottish Budget.
- *Affordable Housing Supply* – COSLA’s main concern has been with the differential in the way that Local Authority and Housing Association new build social housing are supported. Scottish Government is a minority funder of Council Affordable Housing and the current arrangements (which is currently under review) have resulted in considerably less public financial support going to property rented to Local Authority tenants, which means larger loans have to be financed through rents. This is not helpful in meeting our longer-term commitments around poverty, climate change and human rights. The updated proposals being drafted by the Scottish Government creates less unequal treatment between the two sectors through reducing the differential between RSLs and councils, but we remain

unconvinced over the justification for this. The Committee may wish to consider the implications of these funding arrangements on the shared Scottish Government and Local Government commitments to tackle poverty, climate change, and ensure the right to an adequate standard of living.

- *Climate change* – In terms of climate change councils need to be sufficiently resourced to be “early adopters” of technology and “exemplars” of best practice. This is critically important in capital projects, where the scale of Local Government spend can support and foster innovation in supply chains (schools, flood works etc). With 40% of carbon emissions coming from the construction sector, we need to see a fundamental shift away from cheapest tender. However, trends in relation to LG settlements, both capital and revenue, do not provide the room for this approach. Furthermore, Councils need capital and revenue to invest in state-of-the-art fleet, and again set the tone within their communities- councils vehicle are very visibly every day but reductions in core funding mean that replacement is often delayed. If Local Government is to play its part in achieving net zero emissions, then both revenue and capital funding is needed, alongside policy/legislative levers to act effectively, integrating carbon reduction into Councils’ mainstream service delivery, as well as through dedicated initiatives.

5. Financial implications of COVID-19

All Local Government services have been impacted in some way by the pandemic, financially and/or in terms of how services are delivered on the ground. The Committee will be aware of significant one-off, non-recurring funding, awarded to Local Government late in the last financial year (2020/2021). The focus must now be on whether or not councils are adequately resourced to support communities, businesses, families and individuals over the coming 2-3 years and on an ongoing basis thereafter. The impacts of COVID-19 will not be confined to this financial year and most councils are profiling spend into the next few years in terms of the broader support that communities will need and the support needed to cope with ongoing lost income from a range of service areas including tax and rent collection.

6. It should also be noted at this juncture that changes to the system of accounting for capital investment through borrowing are currently being considered by the Scottish Government through a widespread review of capital accounting. Any change will have a negative impact on the scale of investment Councils are able to make. This concern applies to a number of investment opportunities highlighted within this paper, particularly around economic recovery, education (schools investment programme), community wealth, climate change, and housing.

7. COSLA believe that economic recovery should recognise the central role that Local Government can, and will, hold – for example with respect to procurement, employability, capital projects etc. However, Local Government needs absolute flexibility to manage funding at the local level and to use funding in response to need, rather than be pressed into areas of specific spend or to be limited to using funding for one specific client group, by a deadline or within a particular financial year.

**COSLA asks the Committee to examine the way in which funding comes to Local Government and whether it allows councils to fully support recovery in a locally responsive way which focuses on outcomes.**

**COSLA also asks the Committee to support its request to allow a change in regulations in relation to service concessions associated with PFI/PPP capital investments. This change, which is supported by professional advisers as prudent and appropriate, has the**

**capacity to free a considerable additional financial resource at no extra cost to the taxpayer.**

8. Throughout the pandemic, councils have delivered what Scottish Government has defined in terms of support for businesses, individuals and families, often with little or no engagement prior to announcements. This support continues to place administrative pressures on councils – ongoing business grants, pandemic payments, school holiday food payment, self-isolation support grants, outbound calling, and unknown pressures in relation to the impact on Scottish Welfare Fund when furlough ends. This will continue to have impacts on Local Government as we consider what is entailed with respect to COVID-19 recovery.

**COSLA ask the Committee to consider the ongoing administrative burden created by COVID-19, and the sustainability of the approaches taken.**

9. Payments of £100 and £130 have been made to those on low incomes over the last year. To date, around £100m has been paid out by councils, and by Easter 2022, payments of this kind will take the total over £230m. Whilst Local Government recognises the importance of these payments to many families, this approach did/does not provide opportunities for financial inclusion engagement, support and signposting which focuses on longer term change and improved outcomes. Similarly, a move to “cash first” generally, whilst welcomed during the pandemic by many, does not provide opportunities for engagement and support, for example, during school holidays many councils provided family support combined with food.

10. Whilst funding is limited, targeting resource where the pandemic has hit society hardest is a more effective and value for money use of resource and that, where policies are universal, they must be fully funded to enable Local Government to deliver these policies. Local Government is best placed to recognise local issues and target flexible resources accordingly, rather than implement national policy with greater constraint.

**COSLA asks the Committee to look at the wider and longer-term impacts of financial support such as this.**

11. Whilst the preceding section outlines key financial considerations for Local Government taken as a whole relating to COVID-19, the following paragraphs add further detail relating housing and planning, in keeping with the Committee’s remit.

*12. Financial implications for **housing** during the continuing pandemic*

There are a number of key points COSLA would like to make in respect of the financial implications for housing. Firstly, that overall Local Government’s Capital Grant has reduced over recent years which limits Councils’ ability to invest in this area. Secondly the revenue implications of capital investment will be a key priority for the Committee. Furthermore, delays in capital programmes / increases in material costs also hinder progress. In addition, it is important to note that housing capital investment is critical in ensuring rent affordability and warm, safe, comfortable homes for current and future tenants, especially as we go into recovery.

13. The potential changes to the system of accounting for capital investment through borrowing previously referenced will have a negative impact on the scale of investment Councils are able to make in housing.

**COSLA asks the Committee to consider the impact of the review of capital accounting on affordability of current housing programmes as well as the imperatives for housing investment.**

*14. Financial implications for **planning** during the continuing pandemic*

Planning income has been severely impacted by the pandemic and is unlikely to recover fully during 2021/22 or even next financial year. This reduction in income, combined with similar income pressures right across council services, makes it vital that we look afresh at planning fees with the aim of moving towards full cost recovery for councils as soon as possible. It should also be noted that the pandemic came at the time when we were preparing for a full review of planning fees after the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The intention of this review was to meet a long-standing need to address a range of issues with planning fees in Scotland.

**While, understandably, this was delayed because of the pandemic, as we look to recover from the pandemic COSLA would ask the Committee's support to ensure this important work now takes place.**

15. Conversely, as economic recovery gathers pace and working practices and lifestyles adapt to the impact of the pandemic, such as more working from home, planning applications are set to increase in volume which puts pressure on the capacity councils have to process applications within the level of resource available to them. Longer term the planning system will be central to our ambition for achieving a just transition to a net zero economy. Local Government already delivers a high-quality planning service but to deliver further improvements and to meet our future challenges (Climate Change) further additional investment will be required. The alternative to this is that the planning system will potentially be less able to cope with future demands and new challenges, which could put at risk a number of key policy objectives.
16. One potential suggestion, of several that may be needed to ameliorate this situation, would be to grant councils the powers to set their own fee levels for Planning and Building. This is currently under consideration by the Fiscal Framework Member Group, but discussions are not well advanced yet, nor is there a formal COSLA position on this. Nevertheless, this might be seen as a "quick win" in terms of generating additional revenue.

## Health & Social Care

17. In terms of the Committee's priorities, whilst we understand this area will be covered in more detail by the Health and Social Care committee it is important, in the interests of joined up working, that the Local Government Committee is well sighted on COSLA's views relating to this important area. Again, the Blueprint for Local Government is a good point of reference relating to Local Government vision and key asks. In it, COSLA's asks are that Local Government is at the centre of the reform of health and social care; that we require 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 (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) groups whose differential public health outcomes have been starkly highlighted by the pandemic; and that 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.
18. The reform of adult social care is another important area for consideration by the Committee. Local Government supports the aims of the Review, however there are significant aspects of the recommendations which cause concern due to the impact they would have across the whole system. We have agreed to work with Scottish Government on areas of common interest including implementing the Real Living Wage commitment, Fair Work in social care, the overhaul of the current mechanism of eligibility criteria, moving towards ending charging

for non-residential services as soon as possible and further support for unpaid carers. However, we are very concerned at the recommendations on governance and accountability which would see the removal of local democratic accountability and a degree of centralisation. This would be detrimental to the local delivery of social care and its integration with other key community services. We will engage in the consultation process surrounding reform and will ensure that the Committee is will informed of our views on the implications for Local Government.

**COSLA believes the Committee should consider the concerns COSLA has regarding the impacts the current reform recommendations may have on the whole system to support adults to live fulfilling lives and local democratic accountability.**

### **Migration, Population & Diversity**

19. The area of migration, population and diversity is an important one for councils and the Committee will be aware that COSLA had provided written and oral evidence to the previous Local Government Committee inquiry into the matter of support provided to people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This detailed the assistance that Local Authorities have provided under public health powers and duties to individuals at risk of rough sleeping during the public health crisis, in addition to the support that is provided under statutory safeguarding duties to destitute families with children and adults with care needs. It highlighted the growing health, protection and safeguarding risks created by the NRPF policy and concerns about rising needs particularly amongst European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who have not yet applied for, or secured, Settled Status, following the UK exit from the European Union.

**COSLA is keen to work with the Committee to ensure that there is appropriate ongoing scrutiny of these issues and implementation of the joint ‘Ending Destitution Together’ Strategy.**

**COSLA hopes that the Committee will help to monitor and consider the extent to which local authorities are supported and resourced to fulfil their statutory duties and utilise public health and safeguarding powers to respond to destitution and homelessness.**

20. COSLA is working in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to support vulnerable EEA citizens (such as looked after children, care leavers, elderly, Roma community, and people with physical or mental health needs) apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. We have now passed the European Union Settled Status (EUSS) deadline, but it has become increasingly clear to us that vulnerable EEA citizens will still require support to make late applications and move from pre-settled to settled status.

**COSLA is keen to work with the Committee to consider the ongoing need for casework to support vulnerable EEA (European Economic Area) citizens, and to map out the wider need for immigration legal advice services in Scotland.**

21. COSLA continues to work with Scottish Government to deliver actions to improve the lives of Scotland’s Gypsy/Travellers. The joint national action plan<sup>3</sup> has been extended to October 2022 and includes priorities to deliver more and better culturally appropriate accommodation for the community; supporting local authorities to make public services more accessible and to address racism and discrimination.

**The Committee may wish to consider the role of local authorities in providing services and support to Gypsy/Travellers, including roadside encampments and progress made to deliver increased accommodation including through a new £20 million capital investment programme with Scottish Government.**

22. COSLA works with Scottish Government, Scottish Refugee council and other key partners to deliver on the New Scots refugee integration strategy and seeks to support councils in the crucial role that they play in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The outcomes and actions that the strategy seeks to deliver are grounded in an approach that places refugees and asylum seekers at the heart of the communities in which they reside. As such, it is recognised that, for approaches to integration to succeed, they must be about working in and with local communities, as well as with refugees and asylum seekers.

**COSLA would be like to discuss the key role of councils in this regard with the Committee.**

23. COSLA is central to the implementation of the Scottish Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy<sup>4</sup>, chairing the national action area looking at victim support. Victims of trafficking have been found in all 32 local authority areas and Scottish councils are on the front line of the fight against trafficking, spotting the signs, protecting the victims and disrupting the perpetrators. A number of policy developments are increasing councils' obligations in this area, such as the Duty to Notify and licencing, and it is important that Local Government has adequate resources to support this work.

**COSLA would be happy for the Committee to engage with us on these matters, and on the Scottish Government's plans for refreshing the strategy.**

24. Population is a key issue for Scottish Local Government, and we believe this should also be a priority for the Committee. Councils are keenly aware of the projected social and economic impacts of depopulation in particular areas, and the challenges of dealing with population growth in others. We recognise that councils are best placed to assess what policy can and cannot work at local level. That is why COSLA and councils have worked closely with SG to develop the population strategy<sup>5</sup>, published in March 21, and it is crucial that we continue to work with SG during the next steps of implementing the strategy.

**COSLA believes the Committee should include population among its priorities.**

### **Economic Recovery/Economic development, Business Gateway and DigitalBoost**

25. Local Government's economic development services, including Business Gateway and the DigitalBoost Programme, will have a key role to play in economy recovery. However, despite a digital strategy for the life of the parliament and an emerging 10 year National Strategy for Economic Transformation, resourcing these services continues on an annual basis. This is not helpful in recruiting and retaining people with the skills needed to advance the economic recovery agenda, nor does it assist in strategic procurement activity which leads to stop-start service delivery. Multi-year investment funding is required to unlock a strategic response that meets the aims of the relevant strategies.

**COSLA suggests it would be helpful if the Committee focussed on the way in which funding comes to Local Government and whether it allows councils to fully support recovery in a locally responsive way which focuses on outcomes.**

26. The Enterprise and Skills Review highlighted the issue of clutter and confusion in the business support landscape. While work is ongoing across the agencies and with Local Government to achieve greater alignment and collaboration to address this issue through the Business Support Partnership, the pace of change needs to be accelerated and invested in. The manner in which service delivery is organised must also be reviewed and bold changes may be required across all partners to truly unlock Scotland's entrepreneurial potential and to grow a competitive business base.

**COSLA suggests it would be helpful if the Committee considered what opportunities existed in this space to contribute to the desired economic transformation.**

### **Children & Young People**

27. In terms of children and young people the focus for councils throughout the pandemic has been supporting their well-being. We know that those children and young people who are most vulnerable have been affected disproportionately. In education, schools and the wider education system have had to adapt quickly to changing circumstances with school closures, the cancellation of exams and the introduction of remote and blended learning. There have been many examples of innovative practice in how education has been delivered over the past year and a half. The current circumstances have required a strong partnership approach between Local and National Government as well as with the wider education system.
28. The Local Government role in the providing vital public services to children and young people has continued throughout the pandemic. In many instances this support has been extended including the provision of free school meals to those on the lowest incomes. This provision has continued in the holiday periods and sits alongside wider Local Government and third sector activity such as summer activities in providing ongoing help to low income families.
29. Partnership working has been a crucial component of Local Government work in relation to children and young people. We have worked closely with the third sector exploring how we can enhance family support work that would provide early help and intervention to those families most in need and which will have a central role in tackling the poverty related attainment gap.
30. COSLA are working closely with their sector partners to consider how we can improve the current commissioning and procurement system as it related to the provision of family support services.
31. We are also working with Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the Scottish Government on strengthening collaboration between Local Government, Scottish Government and the third sector. The Strengthening Collaboration work has been politically endorsed.
32. There are likely to be financial and workforce concerns for Local Government in relation to education recovery but also in relation to additional pressure on both universal and specialist services for children, young people and their families. There is little doubt that the impact of the pandemic will mean that there will be greater demand for social work services for instance in the short term. In the longer term more families will be require support particularly where there may be increasing financial hardship and associated mental health problems.

**COSLA asks that the Committee consider their role seeking clarity on how these pressures will be addressed as we move ahead with recovery.**

### **Local Government Workforce**

33. The contribution made by the Local Government workforce during the pandemic response and beyond into the recovery is well known. The Local Government workforce has had to adapt in many ways to ensure essential services have been able to continue running. This has involved quick adoption and development of online working tools and the associated distance learning required to embed practice.

34. Frontline services have required to adapt across a broad range of services including not only, health and social care and schools, but also refuse collection, aids and adaptations, repair services, leisure, speech and language and many more. The provision of additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and changed models of delivery continue to and will have lasting impact on the cost of maintaining services.
35. Throughout the pandemic COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government, our Professional Advisors and Trades Unions to ensure effective policy, practice, communication, support and guidance have been in place. A particular emphasis has been placed on the mental health and wellbeing of employees deal with the long-term impact of isolation, pressure and stress caused by COVID-19.
36. The Scottish Government have produced a public sector pay policy that effectively sets a level of expectation for all parts of the sector. Although Scottish Local Government (SLG) bargaining groups are not bound by the policy, little regard is given to the impact it has on negotiations. This is particularly the case when Government have stated publicly that there will be no breaking from the policy yet that is exactly what has happened with health. This again is impacting directly on SLG negotiations with SG unwilling to accept or acknowledge the impact by considering additional settlement monies.
37. Effective funding of Local Government to recognise and reward employees is essential as it is to continue to develop and embed new ways of working that can enhance the delivery of services across our communities.

**COSLA suggests it would be helpful if the Committee focussed on whether the way in which funding currently comes to Local Government allows councils to fully recognise, develop and invest in its current and future workforce in a locally responsive way as we recover.**

#### **Additional information - Innovative Practice in response to COVID-19**

38. In response to the Committee's specific request for information on innovative practices, and in addition to activity referenced above, the following examples and references to further information are provided. The examples provided include specific actions and initiatives taken by Councils in the response to COVID-19 to support communities across Scotland.
39. The examples have primarily been taken from sources compiled by the Improvement Service<sup>6</sup>, and which are outlined on their website, and from the COSLA document "Christie Commission at 10 - Case Studies"<sup>7</sup>. Given brevity considerations, only a few case studies have been included, however the documents referenced contain a number of examples relating to a range of innovative practices taken by Councils, which are consistent with the Christie Commission's 4 pillars.
40. It is also important to note that Councils changed the very way they operate in the response to COVID to provide support to communities. For example, Councils:
- **Delivered new services:** this included shielding support and the COVID-19 helpline (case study): [How Aberdeen City Council has supported residents since the start of coronavirus | Improvement Service.](#)
  - **Redeployed Staff:** Fast and effective redeployment of staff was a necessary response by Councils to support individuals and businesses.

- **Introduced Changes to Free School Meals Provision:** Move to “cash first” by nearly all councils quickly during 2020.
  - **Provided Discretionary Business Grant support and Flexible Financial Insecurity Resource:** Where provided with flexibility locally, councils have used these resources to target where they are required locally.
41. Case studies outlined innovate action taken by Councils:
- **Mental health support provided during COVID response:** [East Lothian HSCP launches mental health helpline | Improvement Service.](#)
  - **Partnership working to tackle homelessness:** [Homeless services strengthen partnerships during pandemic | Improvement Service](#)
  - **Locality Operational Groups - Edinburgh:** This approach started in response to the COVID pandemic. Third sector and the Council staff work together for the benefits of children and families, using an asset-based, dynamic approach, focusing on problem solving. – dynamic, iterative. There is one LOG in each locality, coming together once a week for up to an hour to address problems and find solutions, giving a real-time understanding of what’s happening, raising the profile of challenges like digital inclusion. It has proved to be an effective way of joint working with a different relationship between the Council and third sector, where members attend to bring their expertise, knowledge etc to solve 10 problems. It is also a highly effective at rapid intelligence gathering – ask a question one week, get back a solid response from across the network by the next (credible, effective, action/solution orientated, effective joint working). and all report into a Task Force and then to the Children’s Partnership. Set up during COVID, the work of the LOGS has highlighted existing challenges and the intention is to continue to focus on working together to address these entrenched longer- term issues.
  - **The West Lothian Food Network:** was formed in May 2020 to support households experiencing food insecurity. Funding was secured from West Lothian Council to support the development of WLFN through the provision of a co-ordinator and to develop an annual food action plan. West Lothian Food Bank was appointed as the co-ordinator of the Network with the aim of reducing the number of households experiencing food insecurity and reducing the amount of food waste going to landfill. Over the past year, WLFN has grown from 26 to 38 community food providers covering all nine wards within the Council area; this includes the development of seven new community food pantries and one new community fridge. WLFN has created a centralised food hub where food from Fareshare, local community food growers and over 30 local businesses has been donated. The food is a mixture of ambient, fresh and frozen and includes dairy, baked goods, meat, fish, vegetables and fruit. The warehouse space has been tripled to support this development and there are four vans delivering food to community food providers and to service users throughout the week. 127T of surplus food has been diverted from going to landfill. The network purchases food from local businesses which has, in turn, supported them to be able to bring back staff from furlough. WLFN has secured funding of £470K to support 4,092 people each week to access food parcels, cooked meals, community pantries and community fridges. Of those experiencing food insecurity: 77% was due to financial issues, 11% due to being vulnerable through ill health/shielding, 11% through being marginalised through domestic violence/mental health/homelessness/addiction and 11 1% who had COVID symptoms. Those accessing the network have their dietary and cultural needs met.

