

# **Scottish Government's response to the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Report “If not now, when?”**

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**Scottish Government**  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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## INTRODUCTION

It is over a year since the world changed and found itself in the midst of a global pandemic, which has been an incredibly difficult time for people up and down the country. Despite this, we have seen countless acts of kindness and solidarity as communities, the third sector, and local authorities collectively stepped up to look after one another. The independent report “*If not now, when?*”<sup>1</sup> produced by the Social Renewal Advisory Board (the Board) calls on all of us to harness the lessons we have learnt from these social actions that have made such an impact and apply them in a way that helps us navigate a path for Scotland towards a more equal and fairer country.

The following pages detail the Scottish Government’s initial response to the report. It outlines the impact that the pandemic has had, how we have responded to support people and communities and our motivation behind the creation of the Board. We also highlight how the ambition of the report requires the next Government to consider fully the Calls to Action while also highlighting where the Scottish Government has already made progress and what we can do in the short term to take this even further.

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

During this past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives on a dramatic scale. The direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic have been devastating for individuals and communities across the whole of Scotland, with particular impacts for those living in areas of multiple deprivation, children and young people, older people, disabled people, minority ethnic communities and women. The joint Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) report on *Scotland’s Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19*<sup>2</sup>, published in December 2020, highlights that people and communities who were already struggling are being hit hard. This is driven by reduced income as a result of job loss, reduced working hours, the inequalities arising from furlough and what happens when furlough ends. With unemployment predicted to rise in the medium term and already affecting particular sectors, this negative impact will likely be exacerbated unless strong action is taken.

The Scottish Government has already acted quickly to support people and communities, doing all we can to protect people’s jobs, homes, living standards and access to necessities. In doing so, the Scottish Government has invested more than £1 billion in additional resource since the onset of the pandemic to support people impacted and build resilience in public services<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [If not now, when? - Social Renewal Advisory Board report: January 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/if-not-now-when-2021/pages/introduction.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> [NPF Impact of COVID-19 December 2020.pdf \(nationalperformance.gov.scot\)](https://www.nationalperformance.gov.scot/publications/npf-impact-of-covid-19-december-2020/pages/introduction.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [Helping communities through the pandemic - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/helping-communities-through-the-pandemic/pages/introduction.aspx)

This funding has supported councils, charities, businesses, third sector and community groups to allow them to deliver swiftly and directly for the people of Scotland. They have risen to the challenge and have shown compassion, ingenuity and innovation in how they have worked together in partnership. All this has demonstrated that real change can happen at scale when we work together at pace, with flexibility and passion to deliver positive outcomes for our communities.

This additional resource includes over £140 million to tackle food insecurity, including over £50 million to continue Free School Meal provision during school closures, holidays and period of online learning up to Easter 2021, while promoting dignity through a cash-first approach. We have also launched a Community and Third Sector Recovery Programme, now backed by £40 million, to help the third sector continue support to people and communities in responding to the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Moreover, as part of the 2021-22 Scottish Budget, we will make over £100 million available to local authorities to support people on low incomes. This includes a £130 Low Income Pandemic Payment expected to benefit around 500,000 households receiving Council Tax Reduction. We have also extended this funding to support other households, including those living in temporary accommodation and care leavers. We estimate that around £65 million will be paid to people through this measure. We will also provide two Family Pandemic Payments, worth £100 for each child, for those who are in receipt of Free School Meals on the basis of low income. Payments will be made in the summer and prior to Christmas with around 144,000 children expected to benefit from this investment totalling over £28 million. These payments are in addition to the two COVID Hardship Payments, paid in December 2020 and April 2021, which put over £28 million in the pockets of families and will mean that between last December and the end of the year families could receive additional direct cash payments totalling £400.

At the same time, we are focusing on delivery of existing social justice commitments and these will help many affected by COVID-19. For example, in February 2021, we formally launched the 'game changing' Scottish Child Payment, initially for eligible families with children under six. Payments have now started and for those who applied by 15 February 2021 their payment will be backdated to that day, regardless of when it is processed. This new payment will provide £40 every four weeks for each eligible child with no limit on the number of eligible children per household. Social Security Scotland has written to everyone eligible on their database, and those on data feeds from HM Revenues and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions, to proactively invite them to apply and they will continue to do so as more people access these qualifying benefits.

We also continue to raise concerns with the UK Government regarding welfare cuts, policies that are making people poorer and causing hardship, and the failures of Universal Credit to provide an adequate safety net.

This is significant and unprecedented additional support, however, we realise further substantive action can be taken. The Board's report offers a route-map to address the structural inequalities that lie at the very heart of many of these problems.

## SOCIAL RENEWAL ADVISORY BOARD

The Scottish Government established the Board in June 2020 and, in its initial phase, it was chaired by Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, and Shirley Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People. The Board was brought together to build on the shifts in policy and practice that we have seen as a result of working across portfolios and in partnership with frontline service deliverers in Local Government, the third sector and communities.

The Cabinet Secretaries asked the Board, which included representation from the third sector, think-tanks, academics, equality representative organisations and Local Government, to draw up proposals for how Scotland might emerge from the pandemic with a view to becoming a socially renewed country – by reducing poverty and disadvantage, embedding a human-rights based approach and advancing equality. A first phase of work informed proposals which were taken into the Programme for Government (September 2020)<sup>4</sup>. The Cabinet Secretaries then stepped back, enabling the Board to produce its final report independent of government.

The Board's discussions were informed by the work of nine 'policy circles' that were each tasked with working at pace on recommendations and solutions. The circles were specific groups, working on key policy issues: age and disability, addressing low income, community-led and place based renewal, cross-cutting delivery, financial security, food, the housing system, third sector and volunteering.

In addition, the Board placed people's lived experience at the heart of its work. It supported communities – both of place and of identity – and those who faced poverty and disadvantage to engage and have their voices heard. Community Listening Events were held in 31 local authorities across Scotland, where people were asked what the impact of the pandemic had been for them, how it had changed their lives and what they wanted to see from their lives post pandemic. Four equality focus groups were held involving women, disabled people, older people and young people and four discussion sessions took place with Poverty Truth Commission groups in Shetland, Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow. Finally, the Board had an open "call for ideas" to which it received 100 responses from across Scotland. Half of these were from national organisations and the other half were from local organisations or groups.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the significant work of the Board, the value of their contribution cannot be understated. The report would simply not be the same without their commitment, effort and insights. The Board's lived experience work also helped inform and enrich the joint Scottish Government and COSLA report on *Scotland's Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19*<sup>5</sup>, with direct quotes from participants featuring in that report.

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<sup>4</sup> [Protecting Scotland Renewing Scotland- Governments Programme Scotland 2020-2021](#)

<sup>5</sup> [NPF Impact of COVID-19 December 2020.pdf \(nationalperformance.gov.scot\)](#)

On 21 January 2021, the Board brought together all of this work and published its report "*If not now, when?*". The report sets out a bold vision for how Scotland might emerge from this current crisis with a direction of travel towards a radically fairer future. There are 20 main Calls to Action sitting above 75 sub-actions, across the themes of **Money and Work** (everyone should have a basic level of income from employment and social security), **People, Rights and Advancing Equality** (everyone should see their rights realised and have access to a range of basic rights, goods and services) and **Communities and Collective Endeavour** (we need to work together to deliver a fairer society and we need to give more power to communities).

## **OUR RESPONSE**

The Scottish Government welcomes the ambitious and innovative Calls to Action set out in the Board's report. We recognise that a step change is needed if we are to build a fairer and stronger country after the pandemic, redressing the damage done to so many communities of identity and place by COVID-19, and make changes that deliver for all the people of Scotland.

The Board's report has been published only a few months before the Scottish Parliamentary elections, due in May 2021. As noted above, the Calls to Actions are far reaching and, in many cases, set stretching long-term aims. There is no doubt that some of the actions in the report are more straightforward and more immediately deliverable than others, but many will need extensive consideration, including consultation and co-design with communities. The challenge set by the Board is a large and complex one, which will require tough choices about future spend and investment, use of tax revenue, public service delivery and the safety nets that support the most vulnerable in society. Many of the actions will also require radical action and shifts in culture, values and behaviour if we want to achieve the wholesale system changes required. These choices and necessary changes require, and deserve, full and rigorous consideration, with sufficient time allowed for this work.

As there is insufficient time remaining in this parliamentary term for the current government to give full consideration to the recommended actions in the report, this responsibility will fall to the next government following the May 2021 elections. We expect any new government to consider what immediate actions can be taken now, based on the prospectus set out by the Board, and how it can set a direction of travel to ensure that the response to the Calls to Action have the necessary scale and impact to renew Scotland. This is likely to link to other related reports too, most notably that of the Citizens Assembly.

Current Ministers have made clear, that depending on the outcome of the election, they would want to meet with Board Members early in the next parliamentary term discuss to the Calls to Action and how to progress them.

The Board themselves recognise that, due to their scale and ambition, the delivery of a number of the Calls to Action will be across the next parliamentary term and beyond. However, they also recognise that some actions can be taken in the short-term and the next government will need to consider carefully how it achieves this.

We would expect all of the actions in the report to be revisited following the formation of the new government and decisions taken on if and/or how they might be fully realised.

## **ACTION TAKEN**

While many of the actions will require further consideration and development, we are fully aware of the need to act now wherever possible. The Scottish Government is therefore taking forward work across a range of areas that addresses, either in full or in part, a number of the Board's recommended actions from its final report. The section below provides an overview of this work grouped under the three themes identified in the Board's report.

### **THEME - MONEY AND WORK**

Call to Action: Commit to a Minimum Income Guarantee for all as a long-term aim.

Sub-action: As an immediate action on minimum incomes, the Scottish Government should review – learning from practice in Wales and Northern Ireland – how it can provide income and services to people with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) status.

The Scottish Government seeks to ensure that people with NRPF can access all services and support that are not restricted under reserved immigration legislation. People subject to NRPF are not permitted (under immigration rules) to access most mainstream welfare benefits, local authority housing and homelessness services or the Scottish Welfare Fund. Scottish Ministers have consistently pressed the UK Government to lift NRPF restrictions for people who are vulnerable and at risk of or experiencing destitution, but so far they have declined to do so.

The Scottish Government and COSLA are publishing an anti-destitution strategy that aims to strengthen and improve support for people subject to NRPF living in Scotland's communities. The strategy focuses on what can be done by the Scottish Government, local authorities, the public and third sectors operating in Scotland. As this is a highly complex area, the strategy sets out initial actions and a framework to continue partnership work, with the aim that no one in Scotland is forced into destitution. This will include consideration of good practice which is supporting people already in Scotland, as well as learning from Wales, Northern Ireland and across the UK. The Scottish Government and COSLA will also continue to raise and pursue issues which result from reserved policy and legislation.

An example of work that is part of our anti-destitution strategy approach is the piloting of a Hardship Fund. This is being piloted to support people with NRPF across Scotland who are facing crisis situations, as part of COVID-19 response. Crisis funds are accessed via a cash distribution network of local organisations providing people subject to NRPF with wider advice and support, and offering critical help for people facing destitution. The project also involves bringing together a community of practice with a view to improving coordination of support and develop a model of case work provision

alongside hardship grants, to help support people out of destitution in the longer term.

The pilot is being delivered by the British Red Cross with £180,000 of funding in 2020/21, reaching almost 700 people, including their dependents, across Scotland. Discussions on how we can build on learning from the pilot and extend the project into 2021/22 are underway. Importantly, the project will capture data to inform the potential development of a longer-term model of provision.

Call to Action: Work in partnership to develop a new social contract on Fair Work.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government, Local Government and the wider public sector should commit to attaching Fair Work criteria to all grants, contracts and funding as standard, unless it can be specifically demonstrated that there is a reason not to do so.

The Scottish Government is committed to rolling out Fair Work First at scale and pace building on the £2.4 billion worth of public sector investment to which Fair Work First is currently being applied. From 1 April 2021 Ministers expect Fair Work First criteria to be applied to grants, other funding and contracts being awarded by the Scottish Government and public bodies, and for the NHS, Local Government and Police Scotland to adopt this approach during 2021/22 to extend Fair Work First across the public sector. Fair Work First is the key mechanism for embedding Fair Work across the labour market to achieve the Scottish Government's vision for Scotland to be a leading Fair Work Nation by 2025. As such, employers are being asked to apply the Fair Work First criteria where it is relevant and proportionate to do so.

During 2021/22 and beyond, the Scottish Government has also committed to build on the work already underway in Ayrshire through the Growth Deal, by supporting the development of Community Wealth Building in five areas - Clackmannanshire, South of Scotland, Western Isles, Tay Cities and Glasgow City Region. Working with local partners to produce actions plans in each area, the aim is to identify bespoke solutions that will support local people and economies to thrive and embed a targeted approach to Fair Work. Furthermore, we will build on the existing City Deal activity to ensure Fair Work First is fully incorporated into plans and delivery across the country.

We continue to promote our Fair Work First Guidance to support all those involved in the implementation and delivery of Fair Work First, as well as our Fair Work Employer Support Tool and the Fair Work Convention's Employee Self-assessment Tool that employers and workers can use to drive fair work practices across in workplaces across Scotland.

Sub-action: Employers should do more to value older workers, disabled workers, young workers and carers and prevent these groups becoming 'easy targets' for redundancy as the economic impacts of the pandemic and Brexit emerge.

One of the three key themes of our “*A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan*”<sup>6</sup> is to support employers to recruit and retain disabled people. The Year Two Progress Report<sup>7</sup>, which was published in March 2021, outlines progress made in 2020. This includes establishing a Public Social Partnership (PSP), bringing together employers, government, disabled people’s organisations, and the third sector. The focus of the partnership’s activity is on ensuring employers are equipped to recruit and retain disabled people by developing and trialing solutions to identified gaps in employer processes, practice and knowledge. Over the past year, with the guidance of the Scottish Union for Supported Employment (SUSE) as lead partner, the PSP has established its governance and project management structures, and used co-production to develop projects to test, and learn from. Five work streams have been identified, with business plans developed for each: Attract and Recruit; Retention; Public Sector; Transitions; and Under-represented Groups. In addition to testing and learning from the five distinct projects, the PSP will also engage up to 150 employers over 2021/22, delivering taster sessions to increase their knowledge, confidence and capacity to recruit and retain disabled employees.

In March 2021, we made available an additional £5 million of funding to enhance support for disabled parents through the Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF). This funding is part of the £50 million investment from the Tackling Child Poverty Fund and complements the £9.35 million of resource already made available in 2019-21 through PESF. Evidence that has emerged over the past year indicates the significant impact the COVID pandemic has had on the employment prospects of disabled parents. This investment will support new and innovative action to support disabled parents and help to drive progress towards both halving the disability employment gap and the ambitious child poverty targets.

Through our additional investment of £60 million in 2020/21 to the Young Person's Guarantee we have created around 18,000 new and enhanced opportunities to support young people. This has included support for job creation and creating opportunities for young people, particularly in sectors less impacted by the crisis. Building on this early success and our on-going significant investment in education, employability and skills, we have committed an additional £70 million for the Guarantee in 2021/22. This resource will be used to provide a range of support from training, to employer recruitment incentives and locally tailored wrap around support for DWP programmes like Kickstart. There will be further investment for colleges to deliver around 5,000 shorter, industry-focussed courses as well funding for new graduate internship scheme, increased volunteering capacity and

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-disabled-people-delivery-plan-2021-united-nations-convention/>

<sup>7</sup> [A fairer Scotland for disabled people - employment action plan: progress report - year 2 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-fairer-scotland-for-disabled-people-employment-action-plan-progress-report-year-2-gov.scot/)

enhancing third sector programmes, such as Inspiring Scotland's Our Futures Now and Discovering your Potential.

In November 2020 we published the No One Left Behind Delivery Plan<sup>8</sup>, our strategy for placing people at the centre of the design and delivery of employability services. It promotes a strengthened partnership approach where the spheres of government work more collaboratively with the third and private sectors to identify local needs and make informed, evidence-based decisions, flexing these to meet emerging labour market demands. This includes employability support for disabled people, people with convictions, care-experienced young people, single parents, ethnic minority citizens, and people living in the most deprived areas in Scotland. We have convened lived experience panels with membership made up of users from across No One Left Behind priority groups to co-design a customer charter which sets out our commitments to those accessing employment support. In the 2021/22 budget, an additional investment of £20 million will go towards supporting those individuals at risk of long term unemployment and experiencing inequalities in the labour market.

Call to Action: Focus Fair Work actions on those most affected by the pandemic.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should set up a scheme to help young people set up their own businesses.

We are supporting youth business start-up through support to the Princes Trust and are currently undertaking the initial work to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on this scheme to identify the best route to further provide support.

Call to Action: Extend free early learning, childcare and social care so all parents and carers can access the childcare they need, when they need it.

Sub-action: Local Government should deliver the 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare commitment as soon as possible.

We agree with the Board about the importance of the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours. That is why, in December 2020, in agreement with COSLA, we brought forward secondary legislation to reinstate the duty on local authorities to provide 1,140 hours to all eligible children from August 2021. The legislation has undergone parliament scrutiny and was passed on 3 March 2021.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/no-one-left-behind-delivery-plan/>

## THEME - PEOPLE, RIGHTS AND ADVANCING EQUALITY

### Call to Action: Incorporate the right to an adequate and accessible home in Scots Law.

Sub-action: Make the prevention and ending of homelessness a national priority for the next parliamentary term.

As detailed below, we intend to incorporate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which includes the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Ending homelessness remains a national priority. We renewed our commitment to ending homelessness and raised our ambition in our updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan<sup>9</sup>, published in October 2020, by agreeing a further 49 actions. These new actions include plans to end the use of night shelters; support councils with a swifter transition to a rapid rehousing approach; scale up Housing First; strengthen the voice of lived experience in the policy-making process; advance legislative protections for people experiencing domestic abuse; and identify alternative routes to reduce migrant homelessness.

We set out our commitment to introducing new homelessness prevention legislation for the whole public sector in our Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. We accept in principle the recommendations published in February 2021 by the Prevention Review Group<sup>10</sup>, which take us closer to achieving this commitment. We will consult with our partners across public services, people with experience of homelessness and the wider public as we fully consider the detail of the recommendations, to ensure that their introduction leads to stronger housing rights for people in Scotland.

We have also set out in Housing to 2040<sup>11</sup> that we will take action to realise the right to adequate housing in Scotland. Scotland already has some of the strongest rights in the world for people experiencing homelessness. However, challenges remain in ensuring that people can realise their rights, that judicial remedies are available and that housing rights are effective in practice.

To establish the best way to make realising this right a reality, we will undertake a comprehensive audit of our current housing and homelessness legislation, beginning in 2021. This will help us to identify where there are any gaps in current domestic legislation and where remedies for violations of housing rights can be strengthened.

We will continue to take action to minimise the risk of evictions into homelessness in the private and social rented sectors. As part of our pandemic response, we have legislated to minimise the risk of evictions into

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<sup>9</sup> [Ending homelessness together: updated action plan - October 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-homelessness-together/updated-action-plan-2020-2021/pages/10.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/scotland-prevention-review-group/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/>

homelessness by temporarily extending notice periods, to give the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Housing and Property Chamber) discretion so the Tribunal can consider the full facts of a case when deciding whether to grant an eviction order, and an enforcement action ban in health protection levels 3 and 4. We have also temporarily introduced new pre-action requirements for private rented sector landlords, which must be followed where a landlord seeks to re-possess a property due to rent arrears. These measures help to ensure tenants have time to apply for, and receive, the available support in the short term and, if necessary, to give them time to plan for the longer term as we recover from this unprecedented crisis. Going forward, we will work with stakeholders to develop a new Rented Sector Strategy as part of our Housing to 2040 route map, which will, set out how we will strengthen the rights of tenants and give greater protection from unfair evictions, for example through the introduction of pre-action requirements for private landlords on a permanent basis.

In addition we will implement recommendations published in the homelessness prevention pathways, including those made in December 2020 to prevent homelessness among women and children experiencing domestic abuse<sup>12</sup>.

Sub-action: Address gaps in financial housing support.

Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit are reserved to the UK Government. However, in response to the pandemic the Scottish Government took steps using our limited powers in this area to protect tenants. We established a new £10 million Tenant Hardship Loan Fund to support tenants who are having difficulty maintaining rent payments and added a further £8 million for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), bringing the total investment in DHPs to over £80 million during 2020-21. DHP funding helps tenants struggling with their housing costs or affected by the bedroom tax where Universal Credit or Housing Benefit does not cover the cost of their rent.

We have repeatedly called upon the UK Government before and during the pandemic to make urgently needed changes to the welfare system including lifting the benefit cap, reconsidering the freeze to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and reversing the removal of the spare room subsidy or bedroom tax.

And whilst we have welcomed the changes that the UK Government have made in the welfare system in response to the current crisis, equally we have urged them on several occasions both previous to and during the pandemic to go further and use their powers over social security to make further improvements to support those accessing benefits including tenants struggling to pay their rent and we will continue to press the UK Government on these matters.

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<sup>12</sup> [Improving-Housing-Outcomes-for-Women-and-Children-Experiencing-Domestic-Abuse-Report.pdf \(womensaid.scot\)](https://www.womensaid.scot/improving-housing-outcomes-for-women-and-children-experiencing-domestic-abuse-report.pdf)

It is also important to note that this reserved policy on benefit eligibility and NRPF continues to be a barrier to accessing financial housing support for many migrants. We have repeatedly raised this issue with the UK Government, calling for a relaxation in the NRPF rules, particularly for vulnerable migrants. While there has been some relaxation in the ability to provide financial housing support for people subject to NRPF during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK Government have not provided a long term solution to this issue and we are extremely concerned about serious issues arising after the pandemic. We will continue to pressure the UK Government to address this issue.

Call to Action: Make sure there are enough homes that are safe, warm, accessible, affordable, and in places people want to live.

The pandemic has emphasised even further the importance of safe housing for all. The work of the Board and the Housing System policy circle has strongly influenced the recently published Housing to 2040 strategy<sup>13</sup> and its accompanying Vision and Principles<sup>14</sup> document. These set out a range of actions to ensure everyone will have a safe, high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in the place they want to be.

This year, we expect to have delivered almost 100,000 affordable homes since 2007 and our strong action in this area has helped tackle inequalities and poverty. Housing to 2040 outlines plans to deliver 100,000 more affordable homes by 2032, with 70% for social rent, once the current 50,000 affordable homes target has been delivered.

Housing to 2040 puts our ambitions for place at its core, creating not only quality homes, but quality places too, that meet people's needs and support their health and wellbeing. And Housing to 2040 will help to deliver more town centre living by investing in a rolling programme of demonstrator locations, providing expertise, resources and matched funding to help illustrate what future Town Centre Living and 20 minute neighbourhood models can look like. Our new Place Based Investment Programme, which will be backed with £325 million capital investment over five years, will contribute to our ambitions for community-led regeneration, community wealth building, town centre revitalisation and 20 minute neighbourhoods.

We are committed to supporting our rural communities and we recognise how critical appropriate housing provision is. We will take specific action to support housing development in these areas, helping to stem rural depopulation and supporting communities to thrive.

We will introduce a new Rented Sector Strategy that will seek to improve accessibility, affordability and standards. It will set out how tenants will be provided with greater protections from unreasonable rent increases and give

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-vision-principles/>

people genuinely affordable choices when renting. And we will bring forward a new Housing Bill early in the next Parliament to take forward aspects of the Strategy.

Our aim is for housing to contribute to tackling climate change by 2045 in a fair and just way by delivering homes that are warm and affordable to heat and reducing the emissions caused by housing and housing construction. Housing to 2040 sets out how we will ensure new homes are fit for the future and do not need to be retrofitted later and sets an ambition for all new homes delivered by Registered Social Landlords and local authorities to be zero emissions by 2026. We will also take action to adapt and retrofit existing homes so their occupants can benefit from improved energy efficiency and decarbonised heating.

Housing to 2040 also focuses on the quality and accessibility of homes. We will develop a new Housing Standard and bring forward legislation in 2024/25 to bring it into law. It will cover all homes, new or existing, including agricultural properties, mobile homes and tied accommodation. It is our aim that the Housing Standard will allow no margins of tolerance, no exemptions and no “acceptable levels” of sub-standard homes in urban, rural or island communities, deprived communities or in tenements. This will mean our existing homes will keep pace with new homes, with no one left behind.

It is our aim that everyone can access a home that meets their needs. We will build in accessibility and adaptability to new homes and future proof them by introducing new building standards in 2025/26 to underpin a Scottish Accessible Homes Standard which all new homes must achieve. And we will streamline and accelerate the adaptations system to reduce the time it takes to apply for and receive support.

Call to Action: - Ensure everyone can access nutritious, culturally appropriate and affordable food.

Sub-action: Invest in local food partnership working.

Sub-action: Tackle non-financial barriers to food.

In February 2021 we published a position statement<sup>15</sup> that outlines Scotland’s human rights approach to tackling food insecurity and poverty. The statement reflects our commitment to improving household incomes and putting in place cash-based and dignified responses to financial hardship to end the need for food aid and achieve our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

It also details our actions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where we have invested over £140 million in tackling food insecurity. This has included providing local authorities with over £50 million funding to provide free school meal replacement during school holidays and remote working. We have also provided £40 million flexible funding to tackle financial insecurity and support households struggling to afford food and other essentials. The

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-response-un-food-insecurity-poverty/>

guidance<sup>16</sup> we published to local authorities to support this funding encourages close partnership working across sectors and services to deliver holistic support and promote a cash first approach to food insecurity through improved access to income maximisation and cash payments like the Scottish Welfare Fund. We have worked closely with local partners throughout the pandemic to support the evolution of approaches and share practice development.

In addition to this, in the 2021-22 budget we have committed £49.75 million for a phased approach to free school meals to support both the expansion of free school meals and support in school holidays. The first phase is planned for July 2021, taking effect from the summer holidays, and will enable the provision of free school meal holiday support to all children and young people who are currently eligible for free school meals on the basis of low income. Phase 2 will see the expansion of universal Free School Meal provision for Primary 4 students starting after this year's summer holidays, in line with our goal to provide universal free school meal provision to all primary children by August 2022.

We recognise the phenomenal efforts and energies of stakeholders in providing rapid, holistic support to people over the past year. We know that much of the success of this work has been down to the strength of effective partnership working, drawing on the skills and expertise of different sectors and agencies. There is much to be built on from the successes of these partnership models to strengthen local support and strategies to tackle food insecurity. We recognise that each area has its own unique partnership dynamic and we will continue to support local partnerships to develop a clear shared purpose around reducing the need for food aid through effective income-boosting referral pathways as the default to promote autonomy and agency, alongside access to holistic support to meet people's wider needs.

We will continue to promote on our website<sup>17</sup> the measures supermarkets have put in place to make people safer and support those at greater risk and the wide range of ways to shop. Everyone on the shielding list has been offered priority access to on-line supermarket delivery slots and this offer remains open. We have made £30 million Flexible Funding available to local authorities in protection level 4 to strengthen their local response and support the needs of people in their communities who do not have support networks and are struggling with the restrictions or guidance, particularly those most at risk through health or social inequalities. This could include people at higher clinical risk, older people or disabled people who encounter barriers that emerge from the protection level 4 restrictions, for example in accessing food and other essential items.

We have just recently introduced a number of recent improvements to the delivery of school food which includes new School Food and Drink

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-tackling-financial-insecurity-over-winter/pages/who-is-at-risk/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/food-and-other-essentials/>

Regulations<sup>18</sup> which will help to improve access to balanced and nutritious food and drink. We have produced statutory guidance<sup>19</sup> for local authorities and anyone else involved in provision of school food and drink and engaged with industry and other stakeholders to help ensure they are prepared for the changes that will come in April 2021. We would also expect the next government to explore further investment in local food partnership working, building on the ways of working established during the pandemic to provide holistic local supports for people experiencing financial hardship in order to reduce the need for food aid.

Since August 2019 we have been providing direct financial support to low income families with young children to access a healthy diet through the Best Start Foods scheme. Delivered via a pre-loaded payment card that works like a regular bank card. The Best Start Foods provides eligible pregnant women and families with a minimum of £4.25 a week to purchase healthy food up until their child turns three. The payments double to £8.50 when a child is under the age of one to support breastfeeding mothers to access a healthy diet or the additional costs of providing first infant formula milk. The Best Start Foods scheme has seen take-up rates increase to 75% in 2019-20 compared to 58% for the previous UK Government Healthy Start Voucher scheme (as estimated by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, 2020).

Call to Action: Set a target to end digital exclusion in the next parliamentary term.

Sub-action: Deepen the Connecting Scotland partnership between the Scottish Government, local authorities, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), and the third sector to ensure capacity and delivery that meets the needs of all citizens.

Set up in response to the pandemic in May 2020, Connecting Scotland initially aimed to reach up to 9,000 people at clinical risk from COVID-19 and provide them with a device, data, training and support to get online. This was rapidly scaled up and Connecting Scotland plans now to reach 60,000 people and get them online by the end of this year backed by investment of over £48 million. This means that Connecting Scotland, one of the most comprehensive national programmes aimed at tackling digital exclusion in the world, is unmatched elsewhere in the UK. Next phases of this programme will be taken forward by a new administration.

Our newly published Digital Strategy<sup>20</sup>, shows that we want to go further and achieve world-leading levels of inclusion – as part of an ethical digital nation in which everybody has the skills, connectivity and devices required to reap the benefits of technology. Developed by the Scottish Government and COSLA in consultation with business and the third sector, the Strategy highlights a shared commitment to deliver digital public services that are accessible to all and simple to use. This will allow thousands of previously digitally excluded people to take advantage of the opportunities that being connected brings,

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/153/made>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthy-eating-schools-guidance-2020/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-changing-nation-how-scotland-will-thrive-in-a-digital-world/>

such as being able to access digital public services like NHS Near Me, keep in touch with family and friends, improve their skills and access support services such as financial advice.

Call to Action; Incorporate key international human rights instruments into Scots Law so as to deliver real change.

Sub-action: involve Rights holders fully – from the very beginning – in the process to incorporate these conventions into domestic.

The recently published report of the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership<sup>21</sup>, co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People and Professor Alan Miller, details a wide range of bold and ambitious policy objectives and recommendations for a new human rights framework that will set out for the first time, and in the one place, rights belonging to everyone in Scotland. The Scottish Government has committed to taking forward the Taskforce's recommendations and introducing world-leading human rights legislation which will incorporate four United Nations Human Rights treaties into Scots Law, subject to devolved competence. The four treaties are the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The Bill will also provide a right for older people to a life of dignity and independence; equality rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people; and a right to a healthy environment for everyone. The inclusion of all of these rights will empower people, enabling them to claim and enforce a wider range of their human rights domestically, including in court.

Sub-action: Take action to recast and realise the full potential of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

We are adopting a two stage approach between now and summer 2021 to our review of the operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty). The first stage will be the production of a report, to be published on 24 March 2021, on the effectiveness of the Duty in Scotland, including learning on discharging the Duty during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second stage will be the development of detailed proposals, which will align with the development of a new strategy for more effectively mainstreaming equality and human rights.

Call to Action: Take action to realise the human rights of disabled people.

Sub-action: Improve data collection on the wider impacts of COVID-19 and resultant inequalities, including collecting and reporting the numbers who have died with COVID-19 who are disabled people, older people and carers.

We recognise that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on particular groups and communities, including older people, disabled people and some minority ethnic groups in terms of the direct health consequences

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/groups/national-taskforce-for-human-rights-leadership/>

of the pandemic and women and younger people in terms of the wider social and economic impacts. To improve our understanding of COVID-19 and its impacts the Scottish Government is working alongside other agencies. In doing so data collection, research, analyses and publications are being continually expanded and developed.

As part of this, we established the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity to consider and inform the Scottish Government's approach to the impact of COVID-19 on our minority ethnic communities. We will be implementing the data recommendations of the Expert Reference Group, as well as the recommendations addressing systemic racial inequality, as part of our ongoing "bridging plan" for the Race Equality Framework. We will be working to develop an action plan, embedded in this Framework that will replace the 2017-20 Race Equality Action Plan.

Additionally a Cross Justice Working Group on Race Data and Evidence was set up in October 2020. It aims to identify what is currently known about the experience of different ethnic groups within Scotland's justice system and help improve both the collection and reporting of evidence on race. To achieve this it will work with: representatives from minority ethnic groups to agree the key quantitative and qualitative evidence on race that should be produced across the justice system in Scotland; and justice partners to review whether this evidence can be produced using existing data collection practices and systems and if not, to identify and resolve the barriers to making the necessary changes required to bring this about.

Based on the findings of research into understanding equality data collection in the public sector, published in March 2021, an 18 month, first phase Equality Data Improvement Programme is starting in April 2021 to build understanding around the issues of data collection for public sector bodies. This will include guidance, good practice examples, case studies and research into how best to communicate the purpose of data collection in order to give people the confidence to respond. The final outputs will be an updated Equality Evidence Strategy supported by a new proactive Equality Data Improvement Programme. A review of the National Performance Framework will be undertaken guided by the outcome of the research into public sector equality data.

Sub-action: Ensure that social security policies support the incomes of disabled people and their families, allowing for the extra costs that come with disability.

The Scottish Government will prioritise our commitment to maximise uptake of benefits to ensure people receive the financial support they are entitled to. We are widening the ways in which people can access our services so that more people can access support in the way that works best for them. When we start delivering disability benefits later this year, clients will be able to apply online, by phone, by post or face-to-face. We are also working hard to ensure that all our communications are clear and as straightforward as possible. We will run advertising campaigns to raise awareness of our benefits to ensure people get the payments they are entitled to. By actively

promoting our payments we can remove stigma and ensure people know we are delivering a new system that treats people with dignity, fairness and respect.

We will also protect Disability Assistance by ensuring that it continues to be non-means tested, will contribute towards the extra costs associated with being disabled or having a long term ill health condition and acts as a 'passport' to additional social security payments. We will maintain the level of the disability benefits paid to individuals and will raise them annually by at least the rate of inflation.

We have also introduced the Child Winter Heating Assistance, a new payment to families with disabled children who receive the highest rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance. This payment was £200 in 2020 and will help these families meet the cost of heating their homes through the winter months.

Call to Action: Apply the rights and entitlements in this report to all migrants.

Sub-action: Fully explore all possible powers/levers to prioritise refugee integration.

Sub-action: Engage with employers to promote the right to volunteer of asylum seekers and encourage employers to recruit refugees into their workforce.

Immigration and asylum are matters reserved to the UK Parliament. The UK's immigration and asylum systems are designed and operated by the Home Office. This includes the application of any conditions on a person's leave to remain which may limit their rights and entitlements while in the UK, including the right to work or restrictions under No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy.

This, however, has not stopped us striving to take the steps we can to ensure we support people seeking asylum and those with NRPF. In doing so we are working with COSLA, the Scottish Refugee Council and a wide range of other partners to deliver the *New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy*<sup>22</sup> and engaging with Public Health Scotland and other partners on work to support the health needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

*The New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy* details our aim for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive. It includes an action to develop opportunities for refugees to build and develop their skills, through volunteering, work placements or work shadowing. We provide funding of over £100,000 a year, that currently runs to September 2021, for a refugee employability project, which includes work with employers to encourage recruitment of refugees.

The Scottish Government believes that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work, and the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government has made this point regularly to the UK Immigration Minister in both meetings and correspondence and will continue to do so. We are also pushing the UK

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/>

Government for an immigration system that is tailored to Scotland's distinct needs, enables people to realise their rights and ensures no-one is left at risk of destitution because of their immigration status.

Our vision for Scotland is as an attractive and welcoming country, where people can come either to seek a place of safety or come to work, study and join their family. Our population strategy, *A Scotland for the Future*<sup>23</sup> sets out our vision and the next few paragraphs details some of the work we are already taking to achieve this.

To provide practical information for people thinking about or who have just moved to Scotland we launched *Moving to Scotland*<sup>24</sup> - an online resource that informs people about their rights and entitlements. As it is a living resource, we will monitor its usage and update it to meet migrants' evolving needs.

To support EU citizens in Scotland, as their rights and entitlements vary, depending on when they started living here, together with the human rights organisation Justright Scotland we have produced a series of factsheets explaining the rights of EU citizens in Scotland, which are available in six different languages.

Additionally we are raising awareness of the UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme to make sure that EU citizens, that were resident in Scotland by 31 December 2020, can carry on working, living and studying here. To help people apply for the scheme we have provided £1 million of funding over three years. Most of this work has been delivered by our partners – Citizens Advice Scotland, the Citizens' Rights Project and COSLA. EU citizens can call the EU Citizen Support Service for free advice on their rights and entitlements. We have recently agreed to extend funding for these organisations beyond the EU Settlement Scheme deadline of 30 June 2021 to help anyone who needs to make a late application.

Sub-action: Conduct an urgent review of the socioeconomic impacts of No Recourse to Public Funds.

The Scottish Government and COSLA will publish an anti-destitution strategy on 24 March 2021 to improve support for people subject to NRPF. The strategy will set out the context of NRPF in Scotland and its impacts on people, communities and the economy. NRPF is part of reserved immigration legislation so, as set out in the Call to Action, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government will make representations to the Home Office to seek an urgent review of the socio-economic impacts of the policy.

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<sup>23</sup> [A Scotland for The Future: The opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.scotland.org/live-in-scotland/moving-to-scotland>

Sub-action: Scottish Government should strengthen its ask of the UK Government to allow asylum seekers to work while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim and clarify whether asylum seekers and migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds can access employability support services.

Scottish Ministers are supportive of the 'Lift the Ban' campaign. They have continually pressed Home Office Ministers to allow people seeking asylum to work while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, both in correspondence and in Ministerial meetings, and will continue to do so. For many people with NRPF who have a legal right to work in the UK, No One Left Behind and its aligned programmes have the potential to provide key support into the labour market.

## THEME - COMMUNITIES AND COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR

Call to Action: Further shift the balance of power so individuals and communities have more control over decisions that affect their lives.

Sub-action: Volunteering should be made easier, for those who are in paid work and those who are not, and for carers and other people not in the formal labour market.

The Government recognises the importance of volunteering and would like to take this opportunity to again, underline our gratitude and appreciation to all volunteers for their outstanding and vital response to the pandemic. To ensure more people can experience volunteering opportunities, reducing barriers to volunteering was identified as a key work strand of the Volunteering Action Plan being developed to implement the outcomes of the National framework 'Volunteering for All'. This Programme for Government 2019 commitment was delayed due to the pandemic but work on developing the action plan is now underway. The Action Plan is being co-produced with partners, recognising equalities, and will be aligned to our Volunteering for All National Outcomes Framework. It will also take into account lessons from the community response to the pandemic.

Formal volunteering is also an important element within the Young Person's Guarantee. In partnership with Local Government and the third sector, work is underway to increase the number of formal volunteering opportunities for young people, with a focus on advancing the equity of opportunity of young people.

Call to Action: Improve service delivery and design by empowering frontline teams and the people and communities they serve.

The Social Innovation Partnership (SIP) is committed to the increased wellbeing and capabilities of children and families. It advocates relational approaches that adopt a 'what matters to you' approach to supporting families. With a view to transferring more power and voice to children and families and the front line staff who support them, the SIP plans to deepen support in two key areas. It will trial personalised budgets to enable families to make clear choices that can be put into action quickly. It will also work with a selection of willing schools to put in place its 'community around the child'

model which draws on a range of different assets from within the community that can partner with schools to offer relational supports such as befriending, health & wellbeing supports, complementary curriculum offers and family advice and advocacy.

Call to Action: Build on new ways of working, based on what has worked well during the pandemic, and develop new arrangements for local governance.

Sub-action: The ongoing Local Governance Review must lock-in and build-upon the best of the pandemic response.

During the course of the pandemic, communities across Scotland exhibited inspiring levels of compassion and solidarity as they looked after each other, and contributed significantly to the country's resilience. This illustrated the massive impact communities can make if they're trusted and supported. While the formal process of the Local Governance Review was disrupted by the pandemic, we agree this flourishing of community activism should continue to inform debates about transforming local democracy and strengthen the collective resolve to empower our communities.

On 18 March 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and the COSLA President issued a joint statement<sup>25</sup> on progress with the Local Governance Review which reinforces the shared commitment to subsidiarity and local democracy.

The statement is accompanied by new Democracy Matters material which describes a scenario where people are able to come together in their communities to create new autonomous and democratically accountable decision-making bodies which can take full responsibility for a range of public services. The material includes many of the questions which will need to be answered if these ambitious new arrangements are to meet people's aspirations to improve outcomes for all, tackle inequalities, and enhance human rights. We are not asking people to respond to these questions at this stage in the parliamentary cycle, but we hope they will find the material inspiring and share it with others so it can inform future debate on this important issue.

The statement is also accompanied by an International Review of Systems of Governance and how Citizens Participate. A cross-sector Research Advisory Group thought this would be a valuable resource for future learning and reflection on how best to deliver subsidiarity in Scotland. It provides an accessible but comprehensive analysis of six highly functioning democracies across the world, with Scotland included as a foundation for comparison.

The extensive engagement on the Local Governance Review to date has shown a clear appetite for change to how power is shared in Scotland. A collaborative approach involving the Scottish Government, Local Government and the community sector has created a platform for a transformation of local

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<sup>25</sup> [Local governance review: joint statement - 18 March 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-governance-review-joint-statement-18-march-2021/pages/12.aspx)

democracy through a combination of community, functional, and fiscal empowerment across a wide range of public services.

Sub-action: The public sector must make a long-term commitment to embed place-based approaches at the heart of organisational thinking, advancing equality.

The importance of collaborative partnership working features in the independent Review of the Town Centre Action Plan<sup>26</sup>, chaired by Professor Leigh Sparks, which developed a vision for the future of our towns. The report notes that crucial to the success of our towns will be an ability to remain agile and responsive to the local assets, aspirations and needs of all of the people and communities that live, work and enjoy spending time in our towns and town centres.

We are establishing a new Place Based Investment Programme, which will be backed with £325 million capital investment over 5 years. It includes an additional £30 million and £20 million, for 2021-22 and 2022-23 respectively, which will support community and town centre regeneration. The Programme aims to link and align all place based funding initiatives to ensure we have a coherent approach to sustained longer term renewal, build resilient communities, and promote inclusive growth and wellbeing. Making sure that investments in each place are relevant to that place and for the benefit of all the people in that place, and effectively progressing our 20 minute neighbourhood ambitions.

The overarching intent is to better orchestrate what happens in each place in order to collectively improve the circumstance of peoples' lives - improving the rights, equalities, and wellbeing of all communities. Translating what has already been achieved in some locations into a new normal.

We will also continue to support communities to tackle poverty, inequality and disadvantage through the £18 million Empowering Communities Programme. The programme includes delivering key community investment through the Aspiring Communities Fund with support from European Social Fund and the Investing in Communities Fund of £12.5 million in 2021-2022.

### **Action required by the UK Government**

While additional funding provided by the UK Government is welcome, the Scottish Government's ability to fulfil its devolved responsibilities remains hampered by a centralised UK budgeting approach that gives little fiscal flexibility to the devolved administrations. We need greater flexibility to tackle the current economic crisis and call on the UK Government to provide further support and the necessary flexibilities to respond to these challenges.

Beyond this it is clear that the review of the Fiscal Framework must give Scotland the powers and flexibilities necessary to manage the risks to which the Scottish Budget

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-future-scotlands-town-centres/>

is exposed and to support the recovery and renewal of the Scottish economy after COVID-19.

On 19 March 2021 we wrote to UK Government ministers to alert them to the publication of the Board's report, highlight the recommended actions on matters that remain reserved to the UK Government and repeat our ask of them to provide the Scottish Government with further support and the additional fiscal flexibility required.

## **Next Steps**

It is important that the ambition and momentum of the Board's work carry on into the next parliament. As stated above, we would expect the incoming Ministerial team to discuss the Calls to Action and how to progress them.

We will kick start this work by investing an additional £25 million to take forward a number of actions informed by the Board's recommendations. This will include, among other things, £13.5 million for third sector recovery and transition to support the organisations who have supported our communities throughout the pandemic and £6.7 million to tackle fuel insecurity.

We consider that a number of the actions are achievable either in part or in full over the short term and the following section provides an indication of what steps could be taken to progress them, should the new government be minded to do so.

## **THEME - MONEY AND WORK**

Call to Action: Commit to a Minimum Income Guarantee for all as a long-term aim.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should consider what can be done through existing devolved powers and any further devolution required in relation to income-based social security to enable the implementation of Minimum Income Standards.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should also undertake feasibility studies into piloting a Minimum Income Guarantee.

Given the existing constitutional settlement, a Minimum Income Guarantee is something that could only be fully considered and tested if the Scottish Government had more powers in the areas of employment, tax and social security. For this government, we believe that these powers - and more - would allow us to do much more to tackle inequality and poverty and create a fairer more equal society, than the current devolved settlement allows for.

We are, however, interested in innovative solutions to poverty and inequality and we are committed to exploring the idea of a Minimum Income Guarantee further. However, the implementation of a Minimum Income Guarantee for everyone would have implications for the existing UK social security, employment and tax systems which are reserved, in particular the interaction with reserved benefits, such as Universal Credit. It is likely that the delivery of a Minimum Income Guarantee would require partial, if not a complete redesign, of the existing UK social security system, and could not be delivered quickly. Therefore, any changes in this area could have serious

consequences for people currently in receipt of benefits, and needs to be carefully thought out and navigated.

Early in the new Parliamentary term, the Scottish Government will hold workshops with key stakeholders to examine existing research on Minimum Income Guarantees, the key issues involved, and potential opportunities and challenges. This will then inform consideration of the feasibility in piloting a Minimum Income Guarantee in Scotland.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should work with local authorities to align, automate (wherever possible) and extend entitlement to other income-based support (such as council tax reduction, free school meals and school clothing grants) to deliver a more seamless Scotland-wide social security system.

This recommendation provides a welcome impetus to the important work already underway focussing on making information sharing easier and on the automation of entitlement between Social Security Scotland benefits and those provided by local authorities.

It is our intention to develop solutions to ensure that other agencies have seamless access to Social Security information that they need for the entitlements that they administer. This is being built with the core principles of privacy by design and therefore we must ensure that agencies only have access to relevant information they need and that clients understand how their data is being used and shared.

The Scottish Government is already actively exploring with local authorities future opportunities that exist to make access to entitlements automatic to clients. This would be based on their existing eligibility for other benefits and we are ensuring our infrastructure will facilitate the future automation of entitlements at the point of benefit award. For example, we will explore how eligibility for the Scottish Child Payment might allow local authorities to automate entitlement to Free School Meals, School Clothing Grants, and council tax reduction.

We recognise that as well as improving uptake of these entitlements, automation could support many families who are in low income employment and improve work incentives associated with these entitlements. This could even help provide a birth to aged 16 wrap around support for families, delivered by a partnership of Social Security Scotland and Scottish local authorities.

Social Security Scotland is also committed to ensuring that accessing entitlements from other agencies is as seamless as possible for clients. When clients move to Scottish Disability Benefits our plans will ensure that the entitlements they currently receive as a result of their existing DWP benefits continue, such as Council Tax reductions and Blue Badge entitlement.

We realise that there are significant information sharing, privacy and delivery considerations which need to be explored. In addition, it will be important to

look across the system to scope out all the possibilities that exist for automation. The work underway will therefore consider these factors whilst avoiding constraining the work to certain benefits, and the all-system approach Social Security Scotland is taking to the client's journey lends itself well to this approach.

As an important next step, the Scottish Government plans to work with one or more local authorities to directly test the concept following the implementation of Adult Disability Payment.

Call to Action: Develop an approach to anti-poverty work, including personal debt, that is designed around the needs of the individual.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government, working with local authorities, should review the existing provision of discretionary and crisis funds in Scotland.

Informed by an evidence gathering exercise which began in January 2020, and the work of the Social Renewal Advisory Board, we plan to initiate a full review of the Scottish Welfare Fund in the first year of the new parliament. This review will include examining levels of funding, promotion, take-up and accessibility as well as the current guidelines. The review will also gather insight into how the Fund is administered, to enable us to improve our understanding of how best to support those who need assistance from the Welfare Fund.

## THEME - PEOPLE, RIGHTS AND ADVANCING EQUALITY

Call to Action: Adopt the principles of Universal Basic Services.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should adopt the principles of Universal Basic Services as a long term aim in Scotland.

Universal Basic Services as a concept is interesting, potentially radical, and well worth exploring further. We are aware of a range of practice across Europe, which is taking a different approach to specific themes, but this mostly seems to be based on changes to individual services, rather than as a broad approach to services more generally.

Any future government would need to consider carefully what the principles in question are and how they fit with and can be developed for the Scottish context and our commitments to advance equality and embed human rights. We would want to do that in consultation, as the Board recommends, but further thinking is needed before we get to that stage.

An appropriate initial action would be for the Scottish Government to assess the evidence base for Universal Basic Services, consider the principles, whether these are already broadly agreed or need more discussion and consultation, and begin to shape a workplan for a programme of action that would inevitably take some years, as the Board's report itself acknowledges. However, we would expect any future government to be motivated by the idea of a better approach to services going forward, and Universal Basic Services does seem to offer that kind of radical and transformative thinking.

Call to Action: Strengthen approaches to prevent and address hate crime and public sexual harassment.

Sub-action: The Scottish Government should fund organisations independent of the criminal justice system that have the confidence of the communities they serve and that support the victims of hate crime and public sexual harassment.

The Scottish Government is aware of the impact that hate crime and prejudice has on individuals and communities and we must all play our part and challenge it. We will engage with a wide range of stakeholders as we refresh our hate crime strategy later this year.

We continue to fund organisations that support victims of hate crime, including Victim Support Scotland and a wide range of equalities organisations and will consider how best to ensure such funding is continued as we develop our new community cohesion and inclusion fund.

On 11 March 2021, Parliament passed the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill<sup>27</sup>. The Bill consolidates, modernises and extends hate crime legislation - ensuring it is fit for 21st Century Scotland.

We have established an independent working group to look at misogyny in Scotland led by Baroness Kennedy QC. The Working Group has been set up to independently consider how the Scottish criminal justice system deals with misogyny. This includes looking at whether there are gaps in the law that could be addressed by the creation of a separate standalone criminal offence to tackle such behaviour. The Group comprises experts with specialisms in Scots law, human rights, women's equality and perpetrator behaviours relating to gender based violence.

We will continue to provide funding for Rape Crisis Scotland and the Scottish Women's Rights Centre who support people experiencing harassment. We will work with stakeholders to draft a working definition of sexual harassment for teaching professionals to address sexual harassment in schools.

In addition to what is outlined above, as part of our legislative commitments within the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, Scottish Ministers will publish the next Tackling Child Delivery Plan by the end of March 2022. Development of the plan will begin in the next parliamentary term, including consulting with our Poverty and Inequality Commission, local authority partners, children themselves and people with lived experience of poverty.

In the development of the plan we will give due consideration to all of the recommendations, particularly those which will support us to increase families income from employment, social security and reduce their household costs.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://beta.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

## PARTNERSHIP WORKING

What will be key to realising the true ambition of the report and Calls to Action is a further strengthening of partnerships across all sectors and communities in a collective endeavour to renew Scotland.

A Scottish Government of whatever political stripe cannot progress this work on its own. We have seen a remarkable coming together of our society, public services and communities in the response to the pandemic, but we recognise that the damage done by COVID-19 requires us to do still more. We agree with the Board that the country's recovery response needs to be driven by an overarching focus on addressing structural inequalities – shaped by poverty, disadvantage and discrimination. It needs to actively prevent harm and embed human rights to support sustainable improvement across Scotland's National Outcomes<sup>28</sup>. We must look at how policy development and public services can be shaped around community priorities, with active input and involvement from communities themselves, including communities of identity. This will mean fundamental changes to how things are done here.

With the scale of the challenges we face uppermost in our minds, now is the time to make sure we continue to invest in our future, our people and communities. We must not waste our energy in duplicating effort. Instead, we must take a holistic approach to this work and ensure that we identify and build upon the synergies and connections that exist elsewhere. This includes on our work on the Housing to 2040 Vision, Principles<sup>29</sup> and Route Map<sup>30</sup> and our responses to the reports from the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery<sup>31</sup> and the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland.<sup>32</sup>

The report also recommends that collectively we should recommit to the preventative principles of the Christie Commission<sup>33</sup> to drive real change and ensure renewal happens. We agree there is an opportunity for parties to recommit, reset and reinforce our commitment to Christie, in order to cultivate conditions that ensure our public services are better placed to support our collective resilience and wellbeing in the face of current and future challenges. Local and national experiences from the last year prove that, more than ever before, Christie principles embodying prevention, partnership and empowerment provide the right recipe. Emergency response efforts have worked because local public services, third sector bodies and communities have come together to support them with speed, energy and compassion. The voices and capabilities of communities have come to the fore, while front-line staff have worked with adaptability, agility and flexibility, going beyond traditional silos in order to support each other and the communities they serve in innovative and joined-up ways.

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<sup>28</sup> [National Performance Framework](#)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-vision-principles/pages/3/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/>

<sup>31</sup> [Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland: Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Doing Politics Differently](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

For our part, the Scottish Government reiterates our commitment to Christie principles which we continue to apply in our own work. Many of the actions set out in this response illustrate in some way the value we place on prevention: from additional investment in our Young Person's Guarantee to help young people move positively into work; through investment to prevent digital exclusion and concerted action to minimise the risk of evictions into homelessness; to transformative collaboratives to prevent poor outcomes which we are supporting through the Social Innovation Partnership. The Scottish Government is also building preventative principles into the heart of significant current programmes. For instance, our Economic Recovery Implementation Plan<sup>34</sup> places wellbeing, tackling inequality and fair work at the centre of our approach to economic recovery from the pandemic. We are committed to delivering the transformative changes needed to implement the outcome of the Independent Care Review - The Promise<sup>35</sup>, which involves taking a whole system approach to ensure people with care experience can flourish. Provision of holistic family support will be key to keeping the promise.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

While the work listed above demonstrates that we are not starting from scratch, there is clearly more to be done. The Board's report and recommended actions are testament to the big thinking and bold and innovative action required to help us recover from the pandemic.

As noted above, it will be for the next government to grasp the chance to work in real partnership - with communities of identity and of place - with Local Government, the third sector and with business and employers - to drive change, address poverty, advance equality and embed human rights. Using the National Performance Framework as our guiding star and using the Board's report as a roadmap there is a real opportunity to meet our commitments for a wellbeing economy, drive forward our work on social renewal and build a stronger, fairer and more equal Scotland.

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<sup>34</sup> [Economic Recovery Implementation Plan: Scottish Government response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/economic-recovery-implementation-plan/pages/2.aspx)

<sup>35</sup> [Care Review reports – Independent Care Review](https://www.independentcare.gov.uk/reports)



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