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CWB Item 4.1

**Migration and Population Update**

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| **Summary and Recommendations**  This report is focused on the Scottish Government Programme for Government 2020/21 commitment to work closely with partners to develop and publish a Population Strategy in early 2021.  The Board is invited to:   1. Agree the proposed COSLA position and next steps set out in paragraphs 16 -19; and, 2. Agree that regular updates on the population programme are taken to the Board or Leaders as appropriate. |

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| **References**  Previous reports on migration and population**:**   * Community Wellbeing Board, June 2020 – Migration Advisory Committee call for evidence on skills shortages * Community Wellbeing Board, November 2019 – MAC salary threshold and points-based system commission: COSLA response to call for evidence * Leaders, February 2019 – Post-Brexit Immigration System * Leaders, November 2018 – Local Authority Work to Tackle Depopulation |

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**September 2020**

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**Migration and Population Update**

**Purpose**

1. The Scottish Government Programme for Government 2020/21 has committed to work closely with partners to develop and publish a Population Strategy in early 2021. This report will give an overview of the population programme structures, key areas of work, and next steps to ensure that COSLA and Scottish Local Government views are embedded in this work.

**Current position**

*Council work to tackle depopulation*

1. As outlined in a report that was agreed by Leaders in November 2018, tackling demographic challenges is a priority for Scottish councils. 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. Leaders agreed that COSLA would support councils in this regard and, in particular, the population discussions that were taking place between Scottish Government Ministers and west coast councils.

*UK immigration system and demographics*

1. COSLA has consistently emphasised that Scotland is differentially dependent on migration to other parts of the UK and, as such, we support the need for a flexible immigration system that considers local requirements regarding demographics, workforce and economy. This has become of particular concern with the ending of free movement and the introduction of a new UK immigration system on 1st January 2021, which will apply to EU and non-EU migrants.

*Population programme structures*

1. The Population Ministerial Taskforce was established in June 2019 to consider Scotland’s future population challenges and explore new solutions to address demographic and population change. The Taskforce is chaired by Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair work and Culture, Fiona Hyslop MSP.

1. The Population Programme Board was established to inform, guide and support delivery of the work of the Population Ministerial Taskforce and to review progress on the development of future migration and retention policy. COSLA has senior officer representation on the Board.
2. The Board is supported by the Population Officials’ Group, which primarily comprises Scottish Government officers. COSLA is also represented on this group.

1. The overarching aim of the Ministerial Task Group and the Programme Board is to co-ordinate current and new activity to deliver a cohesive approach to addressing population challenges. This includes:

* Bringing together the range of activity across Scottish Government and partner organisations aimed at addressing population and demographic change;
* Building public awareness of the population challenge Scotland faces;
* Considering the impact of population change on rural, remote and island communities, as well as the population shift from west to east with a view to identifying policy options;
* Considering and addressing the impact of population challenges on the public sector workforce; and
* Addressing the retention of EU and international citizens in Scotland, and encouraging migration from the rest of the UK, the EU and internationally.

1. The Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Migration and Population is comprised of academics from five Scottish universities. It provides independent advice to the Scottish Government on migration, population growth and demographic change. COSLA has strong links with the EAG. The group has published four reports to date:

* [UK immigration policy after leaving the EU: impacts on Scotland’s economy, population and society](https://www.gov.scot/publications/uk-immigration-policy-leaving-eu-impacts-scotlands-economy-population-society/) (Feb 19);
* [Immigration policy and demographics change in Scotland: learning from Australia, Canada and continental Europe](https://www.gov.scot/publications/immigration-policy-demographic-change-scotland-learning-australia-canada-continental-europe/) (Nov 19);
* [UK immigration policy after leaving the EU: impacts on Scotland’s economy, population and society – July 2020 update](https://www.gov.scot/publications/uk-immigration-policy-leaving-eu-impacts-scotlands-economy-population-society-july-2020-update/) (July 20); and
* [Internal migration in Scotland and the rest of the UK: trends and policy lessons](https://www.gov.scot/publications/internal-migration-scotland-uk-trends-policy-lessons/) (September 20).

1. The most recent EAG report was published on 3rd September. Through working with COSLA, the report provides a local authority perspective on demographic challenges and presents seven case studies from Argyll & Bute, Dundee, Glasgow, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Perth & Kinross, and Shetland on how they are attempting to manage population movement.
2. Scottish Government Migration and Population Division provides the secretariat for the Population Ministerial Taskforce, the Population Programme Board, Population Officials’ Group and EAG.
3. The meeting of the Ministerial Taskforce in April was cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequent meetings of the Officials’ Group, Programme Board and Taskforce during May, June and July were also cancelled and the population programme was temporarily suspended.

**What is changing?**

*Programme for Government - Population Strategy*

1. The Scottish Government Programme for Government 2020/21 has committed to work closely with partners to develop and publish a Population Strategy in early 2021. This will set out Scotland’s demographic challenge and the actions Scottish Government will take to address it. It is stated that Scottish Government will identify which actions will fall to local partners and which to the Scottish Government. The strategy will bring together the different strands of activity across Scottish Government and make the case for further powers to develop a tailored approach to migration.
2. The Population Officials’ Group and Population Programme Board met earlier this month and this effectively represented the restart of the population programme. The Ministerial Taskforce will meet on 23rd September.
3. The population strategy will be the key priority of the programme in the immediate term. It is proposed the programme will focus on four broad workstreams to begin to consider a population strategy: migration, fertility, health and life expectancy, and rural and islands.

*Rural migration pilot*

1. The Programme for Government has also committed to develop and publish proposals for a rural migration pilot in Scotland. Scottish Government will work with partners, Local Government and the EAG for Migration and Population in developing the pilot. The EAG will publish advice on a pilot by the end of 2020 and Scottish Government will develop a delivery model and proposal to present to the UK Government in early 2021.

**Proposed COSLA position**

1. COSLA officers will continue to collaborate with Scottish Government and represent Local Government views on the Population Programme Board, Population Officials’ Group and EAG for Migration and Population. We will continue to liaise with Scottish Government Migration and Population officials outwith the set meetings on work relating to the population programme and the rural migration pilot.

1. On 16th March 2020, COSLA hosted a roundtable discussion on population with Scottish Government Migration and Population officials, Chief Executives and other senior council officers. While we received a positive response from councils wishing to participate, attendance on the day was limited due to what turned out to be the start of lockdown planning. Nevertheless, the roundtable provided councils with an opportunity to discuss population challenges across Scotland, and to explore what they think will make a difference to the issues that they are facing.
2. It was emphasised that councils are at the coalface of these challenges and are best placed to assess what policy solutions can and cannot work at a local level. It was agreed that a Local Government population working group should be established to focus on current mechanisms to mitigate population challenges and long-term solutions. COSLA is currently in discussion with Scottish Government to explore how this can best be taken forward.
3. Cllr Parry has also written to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, to emphasise the importance of ensuring a Local Government voice is included in the consultation and decision-making process of the population programme. On 25th March, Ms Hyslop requested a meeting to discuss how the Taskforce can engage more directly with councils as the population work progresses. It was mutually agreed we would arrange a meeting when we were in a calmer period. We are now looking to arrange this meeting in the near future.

**Next steps**

1. The Board is invited to discuss and agree the approach outlined above, and agree that future updates on this work are brought to the Board and Leaders as appropriate.

**September 2020**