

# Scottish Government and Local Government 'Verity House Agreement'

## Introduction

The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) announced a partnership agreement on 30 June. Described by the Scottish Government as a 'New Deal with Local Government', it sets out their "vision for a more collaborative approach" to delivering shared priorities.

## Overview

The VHA promises to conclude a Fiscal Framework between the Scottish Government and Local Government by September 2023. This will govern how council funding is allocated, with welcome commitments to reducing ring fencing and giving councils more control over their budgets. However, it does not promise the increased investment that UNISON believes is essential after many years of serious under funding.

The agreement sets out three priorities: tackling poverty, just transition to net zero and sustainable public services.

The VHA notes the agreement "does not create legal obligations but it is Scottish and Local Governments' clear starting point and public commitment to the principle of regular and meaningful engagement, and respect for each other's democratic mandate".

There will be regular reviews of powers and funding for local government "to ensure adequacy and alignment with effective delivery of outcomes". The partners will work together strategically "to advance 'public service reform'", building on joint work under the Covid Recovery Strategy.

Established pay negotiating arrangements will be recognised and respected. Joint work aims for "better strategic alignment on workforce issues across the public sector, including fair work".

NB: The VHA was followed by the announcement on 12 July of a Partnership on National Care Service. This promised that staff and assets would not be transferred out of councils if an NCS is set up, and that legal responsibility for services will be shared between Scottish Government, councils and the NHS. No details were provided as to how this will be accomplished.

## KEY POINTS:

- The Verity House Agreement is described by the Scottish Government as a 'New Deal with Local Government'
- A Fiscal Framework will govern how council funding is allocated, 'reducing ring fencing & giving councils more control over budgets'
- It details three shared priorities: tackling poverty, just transition to net zero and sustainable public services
- UNISON believes additional investment is key to these but it says little on that
- A subsequent announcement of a Partnership on National Care Service promised staff & assets won't be transferred from councils & legal responsibilities will be shared but with no details on how this will be accomplished



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## Some points from the agreement

It says Scottish and Local Government will work together to:

1. tackle poverty, particularly child poverty, in recognition of the joint national mission to tackle child poverty
2. transform our economy through a just transition to deliver net zero, recognising climate change as one of the biggest threats to communities across Scotland, and
3. deliver sustainable person-centred public services recognising the fiscal challenges, ageing demography and opportunities to innovate

The VHA promises, by the end of September 23:

- improved engagement on budgetary matters will be well underway, in preparation for the Scottish Budget in December
- to conclude a Fiscal Framework between Scottish Government and Local Government, of which regular budget engagement will be a key part.
- to develop and agree a shared programme of activity underneath each of the three priorities, which will focus on the period between now and the next Scottish Council Elections in 2027.

## Further pledges from the agreement

A commitment to “the realisation of human rights for all” to be at the heart of decisions. The Local Governance Review to be concluded by the end of this parliamentary term.

The Scottish Government will work to incorporate the European Charter of Local Self Government into Scots law as soon as possible. Existing strategic and service level plans and associated reporting will be streamlined and refined.

## UNISON response

UNISON’s response to the VHA announcement noted that the local government workforce requires stability and adequate resourcing, including additional investment, to deliver the quality services our communities need.

We will wait to see if either are forthcoming. Noticeably the document makes no mention of working with trade union representatives in the delivery of these objectives or the review of the implementation of this deal.

## Additional reading

- Verity House Agreement announced, 30 June 23  
<https://www.gov.scot/news/a-new-deal-with-local-government/>
- Full VHA document  
<https://www.gov.scot/publication/s/new-deal-local-government-partnership-agreement/pages/1/PDF-version>
- SG & COSLA signatories  
[https://www.cosla.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/43510/New-Deal-With-Local-Government-Scottish-Government-and-Local-Government-Partnership-Agreement-Signatories-List-June-2023.pdf](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/43510/New-Deal-With-Local-Government-Scottish-Government-and-Local-Government-Partnership-Agreement-Signatories-List-June-2023.pdf)
- VHA - UNISON response  
<https://unison-scotland.org/unison-comment-on-the-new-deal-for-local-government-published-today-friday-by-the-scottish-government-and-cosla/>
- Partnership on National Care Service - UNISON response  
<https://unison-scotland.org/unison-comment-on-the-scottish-government-national-care-service-partnership-announcement/>



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