

Ending Destitution Together Strategy - Update

Summary and Recommendations

This report updates members on the review of the Ending Destitution Together (EDT) Strategy which COSLA co-owns with the Scottish Government. It outlines feedback from stakeholders to date and outlines how existing strategy actions will change to reflect feedback and the changing asylum and refugee policy context.

This paper invites members to:

- i. Feed back on proposed areas of work for the EDT strategy 2024 onwards; and
- ii. Endorse the proposed COSLA position and issues for further development.

References

Previous reports on Ending Destitution Together Strategy:

- 24-02-16 CWB Board Item 3.1 Ending Destitution Together Strategy
- 23-10-20 CWB Board Item 5.2. Ending Destitution for People with NRPF and 5.2a Draft EMB
- 23-09-01 CWB Board Item 4.2 Ending Destitution Together Strategy
- 23-04-21 CWB Board Item 5.3. Ending Destitution Together NRPF Survey

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Ending Destitution Together Strategy

Purpose

1. This report updates members on the current review of the Ending Destitution Together (EDT) Strategy and seeks feedback on proposed areas of work throughout 2024/25. Members are asked to feed back on and endorse the position outlined in the paper.

Current COSLA Position

2. COSLA and Scottish Government are co-signatories of the current Ending Destitution Together Strategy (2021-2024) which aims to address migrant destitution, particularly amongst those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions. The strategy brings together a diverse range of key stakeholders to inform how those with NRPF conditions can be supported to avoid destitution.
3. To date the strategy has successfully established a network of valued partners to support this cross-cutting piece of policy work and has fostered a sense of collaboration and co-ownership on an issue which Local Government cannot address in isolation. The strategy is also viewed as an important example of devolved policy innovation which provides a humanitarian, rights-based response to UK Government's immigration policies.
4. In the 2021-2024 period, Scottish Government, COSLA and partners have progressed many key action areas of the strategy. Achievements to date across programme partners are detailed in the [year 1](#) and [year 2](#) progress reports.

What is changing?

5. The [COSLA NRPF survey](#) highlights a growing number of NRPF households at risk of destitution seeking assistance from local authorities. The survey highlights that, between 2020/21 and 2022/23, the number of NRPF referrals increased 174%, while the number of supported cases increased 260%. Alongside increasing case numbers, the complexity of cases has increased as the asylum legislative landscape continues to change at pace.
6. Additionally, the full implications of the Illegal Migration Act (IMA) in the devolved context are still not fully understood¹. Once fully introduced, the IMA will limit the rights and entitlements of people seeking asylum by removing the right to claim asylum for all people arriving via irregular (non visa) routes as of the 20 June 2023. This has been described by the UN Refugee Agency as an [asylum ban](#). Reduced routes to settlement and means to regularise status of those arriving after the June date will lead to an increase in destitution, homelessness and exploitation. Applicants whose claims are under assessment will be eligible for asylum support, however those whose claims are found to be inadmissible will be unable to work and will have NRPF conditions applied.
7. Recognising the changing needs of those with NRPF at risk of destitution in Scotland, a review of the EDT strategy is underway. Engagement sessions were held with key

¹ Some helpful summaries of how the Illegal Migration Act will impact local authorities have been developed. See, for instance, those by the [No Recourse to Public Funds Network](#) and the [No Accommodation Network](#).

stakeholders in February and March 2024 where the focus of discussion was on the vision and principles of the EDT strategy, and what can be done to build on the progress to date. The sessions brought together experts to reflect on the progress already made, but also to highlight what remains to be done, the gaps in support and what could be done to address these. Key issues discussed included the ongoing and critical need for casework provision for those with NRPf conditions who are appeal rights exhausted, have insecure immigration status and are at risk of destitution, or already destitute, and the increasing need for affordable interpretation services to support people whose first language is not English.

8. Additionally, COSLA continues to press the need to ensure a joined up strategic approach is taken to supporting those with NRPf conditions to access affordable secure accommodation. Information from COSLA partners IOM highlights that, in 2022/23, 44% of people being supported by the service were rough sleeping or homeless. This has been recognised through dedicated action under the proposed New Scots Delivery Plan (see agenda item 5.1: New Scots Delivery Plan).
9. Responding to these issues, Scottish Government colleagues have provided COSLA with the below overview of proposed resourcing for 2024/25 to deliver on each strategy action:

Action	Proposed 2024/25
1. We are piloting a Hardship Fund to support people with NRPf across Scotland who are facing crisis situations.	The pilot project of the Scottish Crisis Fund, delivered by the British Red Cross, finished in March 2024. Work is now underway to review what additional support can be put in place for those who are facing crisis situations.
2. We will improve dignified access to culturally appropriate food, in line with the dignity principles outlined in Dignity: Ending Hunger Together.	Ongoing project funding for 2024/25 to be delivered by Govan Community Project.
3. We will contribute to the ambition of ending homelessness and specifically support actions relating to people with NRPf and destitute asylum seekers, as set out in the Ending Homelessness Together action plan.	Ongoing funding for partnership work with Fair Way Scotland.
4. We will strengthen provision of financial assistance and wider local authority support to destitute families with children and vulnerable adults.	Ongoing funding for COSLA to support the NRPf survey and support for LAs
5. We will update guidance and training to support local authority provision of services to people with NRPf.	Ongoing funding to update and review the existing COSLA Migrants Rights and Entitlements Guidance throughout 2024/45
6. We will improve access to primary health services, including by working with Public Health Scotland and other partners to address health inequalities experienced by people subject to NRPf, translating Health Access Cards and promoting to NHS staff the right to access healthcare for migrants and people seeking asylum.	Ongoing partnership with Public Health Scotland including production of resources to raise awareness of NRPf amongst health practitioners.
7. We will improve access to mental health services for adults and children with NRPf by working to better understand the barriers and to collectively agree the practical actions that can be taken by	Ongoing partnership working with Simon Community Scotland

local authorities, the Scottish Government and the NHS. We will also work to inform forthcoming work on mental health service renewal.	
8. We will invest in the provision of diagnostic legal advice delivered in partnership with advocacy support for people subject to NRPF, including expanding the geographical reach outside Glasgow.	End of previous diagnostic legal advice and advocacy support service delivered by Scottish Refugee Council, in partnership with Fair Way Scotland. Legal diagnostic service now encompassed into new Refugee Support Service .
9. We will increase access to specialist immigration advice to support local authorities assisting people with NRPF. This will help support especially vulnerable groups and complex cases, as well as building local capacity and strengthening local service design. It will also collect data to strengthen the national evidence base on immigration advice needs.	Continuation of funded post at IOM to support local authorities and provide advice.
10. We will extend financial support to people subject to NRPF where that is possible to do so, on the same basis. We will explore opportunities to ensure people are included in any new benefits developed through the extended social security powers. While these powers are limited, any new benefits should be made equally available to everyone living in our communities where possible.	Work is ongoing to scope options to deliver this in 2024/25
11. We will ensure that employability support is accessible for people subject to NRPF who have permission to work. We will improve understanding of the employability support needs of people with NRPF to strengthen the pathways and approach of No One Left Behind.	Work is ongoing to scope options to deliver this in 2024/25
12. We will contribute to development of the next Race Equality Action Plan to ensure that it takes into account the challenges faced by people with NRPF and explore what further action can be taken to ensure no one faces destitution.	Ongoing work with Strategic Team for Anti-Racism in Scottish Government
13. We will work with people with lived experience of destitution and NRPF to continue to inform and shape the strategy during implementation. This will include supporting opportunities for people to participate meaningfully in policy development and service design at national and local level.	Lived experience forum 'Experts by Experience' established in 2023 and facilitated by Govan Community Project through funding from SG.

Proposed COSLA Position

10. The new plan should be informed by engagement with service providers and those with lived experience across Scotland. The New Scots partners have undertaken a significant amount of engagement with those who have lived experience and this information should also be considered. There are clear synergies between EDT and the work being undertaken through the New Scots Strategy and its Delivery Plan, and those should be recognised and built upon where that is possible.
11. It is also important that there is ongoing work with partners to ensure that the delivery of the range of actions as detailed above are achievable, and that gaps are identified and,

where possible, addressed through the development of further actions that can be incorporated in the strategy going forward.


12. The Board is asked to provide comment on this approach and any concerns or issues arising from local officers on the proposed activity plan for 2024/25. Officers would particularly welcome any feedback on how existing actions could be strengthened or expanded to reflect delivery challenges at an operational level.

Next Steps

13. Following feedback from the Board, COSLA will continue work with Scottish Government to review the EDT strategy and will return to the Board in late summer with a final revised strategy for members’ agreement.

Date Considered: June 2024

Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

<p>COSLA Plan 22-27</p> 	<p>Priority Areas</p> <p>Strengthen Local Democracy <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Secure Sustainable Funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Enhance Education and Support for Children and Young People <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Verity House Agreement</p>	<p>Shared Priorities</p> <p>Tackling Poverty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Just transition to net zero <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Sustainable Public Services <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>