

POSITIVELY LOCAL

COSLA'S MANIFESTO FOR PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM



COSLA's routemap to reform:

- 1 Reform should be framed around the improvement of outcomes.
- 2 Reform should look at the whole of the public sector not just one element.
- 3 Reform should be based on robust evidence and deliver community benefit – that implies local service integration not centralisation.
- 4 Reform should focus on finance, policy, systems and governance before looking at structures and boundaries.
- 5 Local democracy and accountability should be at the heart of the reform process and should be enhanced by reform rather than diminished.

Real challenges... **Real reform**

COSLA – the voice of local government in Scotland – has backed a radical and bold approach to the reform of public services based on a strong evidence base and our democratic values.

COSLA wants to promote an alternative vision for reform based on developing public services that are integrated at a local level. We think we need to use all the levers of reform – from public policy to legislation, from public finance to governance, in order to optimise the benefits that can be felt by our communities.

Our manifesto is radical as it asks the Scottish Government and Parliament not to do more, but to do less. We are asking national politicians not to impose change or centralise services, but to take a step back and think about the reform that will make a real difference to Scotland's communities. To put that another way, government of the people, for the people, by the people means that power needs to be closer to the people than it is just now.



Strengthening local democracy

Many people have already rushed to conclusions about the future of our public services. As the Scottish parliamentary elections approach, national politicians may look for proposals that are quick to implement, easily understood, and which grab headlines. COSLA is not convinced by this approach.

We have already heard proposals for a single fire service, a single police force, for the NHS to take over social care and by the time Parliament rises there will no doubt be some similar suggestions on education and other core local government services.

COSLA urges parliamentarians not to opt for a clumsy and disjointed restructuring of services. Simply centralising control and decision making may feel like taking action, but it will lead to a weaker democracy in Scotland. It will take power out of the hands of individuals and communities and concentrate it at Holyrood or with distant and faceless bureaucracies.

Local democracy is weak compared to Europe

Scotland is already one of the most centralised countries in Europe. Almost all European countries have more councils than Scotland, they cover smaller populations, they have better constitutional protection

and considerably less reliance on national funding.

It is also no coincidence that our European neighbours are often more successful at improving outcomes.

We should have the ambition to replicate this in Scotland. Surely we do not want to weaken democratic accountability still further.

Restructuring is costly and achieves little

Any reading of history demonstrates that restructuring public services is costly, high risk and frequently reduces rather than adds value.

Since 1980 there have been 20 major structural reforms in the UK public sector. None of them have been delivered in the timescales or the costs originally suggested. None of them have delivered the financial savings they were designed to, and all have diverted resources and energy during the period of change to such an extent that services moved backwards not

forwards.

The financial argument for restructuring simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

A credible alternative

No part of COSLA's opposition to poorly thought out structural reform should be seen as a suggestion that we do not embrace change or that we do not recognise the need for efficiency within the service delivery systems we and our partners operate – it's just that structural change on its own is not the best way to tackle our nation's most profound problems.

Instead, we want to promote an alternative, based on integrating services, on using all the levers of reform rather than just the ones that look good. Our routemap is based on the belief that whatever change we embrace must deliver sustainable benefits for communities, not sound bites.



Dealing with causes not symptoms

Only an outcomes focused approach to reform will improve public service delivery in Scotland.

Public services have had real success in addressing Scotland's most significant problems, providing high quality education, health and social care, justice, employment and protecting the environment.

However, more needs to be done to ensure that high quality public services fully translate into better outcomes for everyone in Scotland. That need is all the more acute at a time when resources are reducing and demand is growing quickly.

COSLA recognises that our nation faces significant challenges. Poor outcomes for a small proportion of the population drive very large amounts of public spending. We have an ageing population and a care system that needs new investment. We face poverty and disadvantage in too many parts of Scotland. Young people risk being lost to worklessness, and drug and alcohol misuse have profound implications. Investment to achieve zero waste and address road repairs is significant, and actions to address carbon emissions and climate change need to be funded.

Outcomes not Inputs

COSLA and our member councils have been the driving force behind an outcomes focused approach to service delivery in Scotland.

At its core has been the end to managing services by ring fencing their budgets to react to the problems individuals and communities encounter. We recognised that this was hugely expensive and did little to prevent problems from emerging in the first place.

Instead, we have started dealing with causes not the symptoms by focusing our resources on delivering outcomes and measuring services by the improvements they engender in people's lives.

For four years local government and its partners have driven this forward. We have championed cross organisational service design and delivery, and made good headway with supporting systems and governance. By international comparison, the pace of delivery is recognised as impressive.

Unfortunately, although our approach

is sound, and is working, the coming weeks and months are likely to witness an attack on outcomes, and aggressive campaigning on 'input' measures, like the number of teachers or police.

The real question is what difference extra police or teachers or doctors make in terms of individuals' lives. We should be less focused on how quickly an ill person sees a consultant than on why so many people are becoming ill in the first place; less interested in the number of police constables we have than in the type of policing they're asked to do.

There is an unprecedented opportunity to make a real difference to Scotland's communities. Our manifesto sets out the evidenced, rational, and radical process of reform that we are committed to, and we want to work with anyone who is similarly interested in improving public services in Scotland.

Ensuring that outcomes drive reform will, admittedly, be difficult. Success will not be achieved by the next election or the next but one – although we will see real progress on the things that matter. However this is a long term project that will require focus and effort. Practically, it is also difficult to measure outcomes. Compare that against inputs and outputs – so many nurses and police, shorter access times and smaller classes – and it is easy to see why political discourse tends not to favour the language of outcomes.

Indeed, instead of being based on principles, evidence, and community benefit – all of which COSLA has embraced and advocated – we are concerned that the public sector reform debate is in danger of becoming short-termist, unfocussed, and poorly evidenced. That will do nothing to tackle the very real problems that Scotland faces.

No to Ring Fencing

Some parliamentarians like ring fencing, and like easy to collect input measures rather than difficult outcome ones.

For those reasons, some may be tempted to favour populist looking but unhelpful input commitments and to undermine the outcomes approach.

Such criticisms will either be completely spurious, such as the suggestion that Ministers used to directly control expenditure on services and they don't now. Or they are a willful misunderstanding of the process, such as the suggestion that performance management has disappeared as a

result of the adoption of an outcomes approach. Or they are genuine difficulties for which solutions are being delivered.

No to Unintended Consequences

At the same time, any call for a return to ring fencing will once again force public services to care about the wrong things.

COSLA is therefore speaking out against the unintended consequences that input measures bring about. Not only is it difficult to see how specific numbers of police officers could possibly relate to real community safety and criminality in Scotland, but we could have the ridiculous situation where civilian staff may lose their jobs to be replaced by police constables carrying out inappropriate duties at a far higher cost.

Indeed, the idea that complex outcomes can be reduced to a series of inputs simply does not add up. Given all the facts, no-one can believe that the education of young people can be reduced to whether we have 53,000 teachers or class sizes of 18. Rather, attainment and destinations are driven by a complex mix of family, job circumstances, community support and infrastructure.

Outcomes are interdependent – for instance, a person's well-being is defined not just by their overall health but also their safety, their opportunities, their environment.

Our approach to reform must be similarly defined. In other words, only by integrating public services will we begin to truly nurture an outcomes ethos.

More help to Tackle Inequalities

Scotland faces significant inequalities,

and COSLA is calling for a debate about why public services are not addressing social problems at their root.

We need to look at the evidence about what works. Giving every child the best start is crucial to addressing problems like obesity, heart disease, mental ill-health, educational achievement and poverty.

We also need to tackle social and economic challenges: worklessness, housing, physical environments, and financial exclusion, and address behaviours that can be so damaging to mortality and morbidity: smoking, alcohol, drugs, and poor diet.

That means investing public sector spend in Scotland (£33billion) 'upstream' to prevent social problems from emerging in the first place.

Currently, resources are heavily weighted towards reactive care and crisis: hospitals account for vast resources but tend to focus on illnesses and emergencies; prisons are equally expensive and tend not to prevent re-offending.

Over the last 4 years and in partnership with Scottish Government, local authorities have been making good progress at developing approaches to early intervention. However, we need to go further and real transformational change will depend on Parliament loosening rigid resource allocations and empowering public agencies to move resources from crisis intervention to crisis prevention (like housing and family support, health screening, community policing). That means strengthening not circumventing community planning, by aligning and integrating some budgets.

COSLA's Routemap to Reform

Public sector reform needs to be about whole systems; about funding arrangements and income; about governance, duties and powers; about the principles of democratic accountability; and only then about boundaries and structures.

COSLA's alternative route to reform is legitimate and convincing. Scotland's debate on the public sector will either embrace our principles and enhance outcomes for our communities, or it will damage our ability to protect communities, and damage local democracy. Our reform agenda is therefore based on six fundamental principles that will guide us sensibly through the reform process:



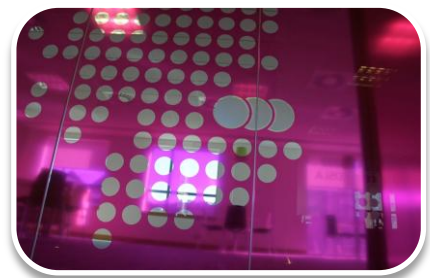
REFORM MUST DELIVER BETTER OUTCOMES

Public Services need to be focused on the joint improvement of outcomes – to plan for outcomes, to budget for outcomes and to be accountable for outcomes.



REFORM MUST INTEGRATE SERVICES

Reform must integrate local delivery and funding with democratic accountability. Only where co-ordination or discharge of duties is impossible or less efficient locally should other alternatives be sought.



REFORM MUST IMPROVE LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Local democratic accountability for locally-delivered services needs to be strengthened and tax raising responsibilities increased.



REFORM MUST STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

Public services need to be responsive to local needs, be enabling, and build on local assets in order to maximise community engagement and empowerment.



REFORM MUST ENABLE EARLY INTERVENTION

Public policy needs to be refocused towards early intervention and prevention and away from its current universalist assumptions.



REFORM MUST CONSOLIDATE

Public bodies should be given more powers and less duties; and the citizens of Scotland should be given a clearer description of their rights, entitlements and responsibilities.

Challenging Thinking

Our routemap is challenging. It challenges the idea that complex outcomes can be reduced to input measures and shows the damaging effect on communities and the services they depend on. It challenges the assertion that restructuring is a short cut to better, more responsive or efficient services. And it fights to protect democracy and accountability in the face of ill conceived centralisation.

CHANGING SYSTEMS NOT STRUCTURES

People want better outcomes from the public sector in Scotland. That Scotland should be fairer, healthier, wealthier, greener and safer is a sound aspiration and should be the driving force behind reform. Although we have set out on that journey, reform should assess whether public sector policy, funding, and ways of working are fully geared up.

If, at the end of the day, our aim is to design services that improve outcomes, then reform ought to address the full range of options required to deliver these. The solution to the complex multi layered problems that we face cannot be solved by simplistic structural change. Instead, reform must address the funding arrangements and investment decisions that support services, the systems that drive organisational behaviours, the policy and legal issues that govern activity, and about democratic governance.

In fact, it is irresponsible not to look at all of these given that some will inevitably be easier, quicker and less expensive to effect - and have a more positive impact on outcomes – than the blunt instrument of structural change. For example, with reduced resources to do the job, we can only get better health outcomes for the much greater number of older people we need to support if we are not distracted by fanciful structural proposals. Only a thorough, rational, rigorous review will help. This will require an honest appraisal of where we do well and where we face greater challenges, with an equally honest appraisal of the reform that has already been started.

The challenge of reforming the public sector as a whole might therefore be seen as overwhelming. A methodology is required to guide us through the process. We have set out that methodology in our report to the Christie Commission, and have adopted it ourselves.



“If our aim is to design services that improve outcomes, then reform ought to address all the options required to deliver these.”

EMPOWERING NOT UNDERMINING

COSLA wants to see local government enhanced. We don't want this because we like power or because we feel the need to protect our territory. Instead, we believe enhanced local government, firmly linked to communities, is best placed to deliver better outcomes for communities.

Councils have been the driver of public services and public well-being in Scotland. They have achieved this because only locally delivered and accountable services are sensitive to individuals and communities, and can respond to the drivers of positive and negative outcomes within different council boundaries- social problems in Glasgow are not the same as those in Argyll and Bute.



“If restructured national systems still require local delivery– but with less accountability and sensitivity to local need – then where is the added value?”

COSLA is therefore sceptical of those who favour centralisation over local integration. If a national system would still require local delivery– but with less accountability and sensitivity to local need – then where is the added value?

That is not to say COSLA would argue for all services to be delivered locally. But if we focus on, say, the diversionary potential of community policing, it is difficult to argue for a centralised, aggregated model. What is more, localism does not mean being disconnected from national activities and vice versa.

Moreover, if we believe that democracy is about bringing power closer to people, then so too do we have to devolve power and guard against central control of civic life.

In fact, local accountability is hard-wired into the public sector ethos. Scotland’s identity is to a large extent local – and people’s expectations are similarly defined (the local school or park, the gritting of local roads, the collection of waste).

More people vote in countries where the ratio of voters to elected representative is smaller, and in Scotland’s smaller communities, we can see the positive impact that councillors have on turnout. Low electoral turnout is a symptom, not a cause, of weak local democracy.

Local democracy also breathes life into social engagement, expressed as community development, co-production, and personalisation (all of which are central to the outcomes ethos). People want to exercise control and choice over their lives, and to do that they need locally delivered and accountable services.

At the same time, we realise that some argue that localism does not always deliver services equitably. Why should a service take longer in one part of the country than another? This asks the wrong question. The issue should be about equity of outcome. Nevertheless, we accept that localism can deliver legitimate or illegitimate variation. Whereas legitimate variation is the result of local democratic choice and control, illegitimate variation is a reflection of poor quality service or performance. That is why we are fully committed to delivering best value across all of our services, and want that to be extended across the public sector.

Of course it is right that we reflect on varying performance across Scotland. But centralisation punishes communities that currently enjoy the very best services, and deprives the others of the chance to reach that level. Standardisation is therefore not the answer - it will only deliver consistent mediocrity. In local government, we would prefer to pursue excellence - and we'll achieve that through a benchmarking approach that measures performance against the best, and which shares excellent practice. Local diversity can be a force for good.

LOCAL DELIVERY WORKS

Localism ensures access to democracy and builds community capacity: Local democratic control means services and support by communities for communities. Councillors are close to the communities and people they represent, and uniquely accessible to them. That ensures that services are developed close to communities, not by anonymous or distant bureaucracies.

Localism promotes community partnership: Community planning harnesses the potential of the public, private and voluntary sectors. That means that agencies work towards common goals. Restructuring will, in all likelihood, destroy the partnerships that have been built.

Localism improves community well-being: Local government power to advance well-being is defined in law and provides a foundation for social justice. It means that councils and their partners can address entrenched social problems – and provide public protection.

Localism delivers early intervention and prevention: Local government services are uniquely capable of supporting early intervention and prevention – more so than other public agencies which react to negative outcomes rather than prevent them from occurring.

Long term issues... long term thinking

COSLA is asking for a rational, integrated and fundamental review of the public sector based on principles and evidence. While we believe we can be successful in the medium and long term, we are mindful that short term proposals are already being developed.

Our views on these are based on the methodology we have developed and recommended to the Christie Commission, and on a strong will to ensure that short term thinking does not destroy what is vital to improve outcomes.



COSLA sees no evidence for restructuring Police or Fire into national or supra-regional agencies...



With crime and fire deaths at an all time low, the future of Policing and Fire in Scotland must not be paralysed by short-term expediency.

POLICE AND FIRE STRUCTURES ARE A DISTRACTION, NOT A SOLUTION

Scotland is moving towards structural change but has not thought through the evidence. The SNP would prefer a single fire and rescue service, and a single or regional police force, but have undertaken to consult on this. Labour argue for a single police and a single fire service. The Conservatives want this too, but with elected police commissioners. The Liberal Democrats don't support single service models and are considering their preferred options for moving forward.

There is no case for a single force and nothing COSLA has heard from the various political parties suggests otherwise. Indeed, existing national arrangements such as the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) have yet to prove wholly effective and still do not have suitable governance arrangements to hold them to account.

We therefore oppose a policy of structural change based on rhetoric. In fact, the evidence from the Sustainable Policing Report shows that most, if not all, of the projected £153m savings are achievable through more efficient working within existing structures. Added to that, experience suggests set up costs of £92m will be a gross under-estimate and that savings will be quickly swallowed up.

The upheaval of major structural change will be immense at a time when public services should be concentrating on making efficiencies and savings. Moreover, with 80% of the savings related to workforce costs, these proposals mean losing large numbers of civilian and front line police posts.

More fundamentally, current proposals for structural change (whether they save money or not) are focused on functions, and scarcely consider local accountability or the delivery of better outcomes for communities.

So what should we do?

COSLA is not suggesting that Police and Fire are immune to the financial difficulties facing public services, or that efficiencies can't be found. Now is the time to stop talking and get on with improving working arrangements across existing boundaries and between national and local functions, developing further shared services, improving procurement, focusing policy on prevention and early intervention, and strengthening local accountability.

The future of policing and fire in Scotland must not be paralysed by short-term political expediency. Structural reform is a distraction, not the solution.

KEEP CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

Some MSPs argue that adult care services should be run by the NHS. We say structural change will not address the many challenges facing health and social care in Scotland: increasing demand for services as a result of an ageing population, an expensive hospital-based model of care, and a policy context that takes scarce resources away from the least well off.

They claim that a single care structure will deliver the efficiencies and outcomes we desire. However, despite a single management and funding structure, the NHS has not made significant progress in shifting the balance of care from acute hospital based care to community health care - how would adding social care to that arrangement improve matters?

Some also say that they have to act because people with care needs are unhappy with their services. Yet we know from the Social Work Inspection Agency that 89% of older people believe the services they receive are of good quality and 85% say they have helped them lead a more independent life.

Like MSPs, we want people to live independently in the community. Why, then, give social care to the NHS? Social work services have a strong track record in supporting vulnerable people, linking into local government services such as housing, employment and education; all of these services within local government are focused on improving well-being – not treating illnesses.

NHS control of social care will not end postcode lotteries– there is even greater variation within the NHS than local government. In any case, managing local differences in locally relevant ways is far more effective. People want care tailored to their needs – not standardised packages decided by bureaucrats.

In sum, giving social care to the NHS will be expensive, distracting and ineffective.

So what would we do?

There are going to be more older people but they have to be supported to lead healthier lives that place less demand on acute services. This might involve better education, housing adaptation, more family support and earlier intervention with services that are less expensive and more preventative.

- In the short term, we would ask the Parliament to draft a charter of rights and entitlements for people with support needs and define the total resource available for investment in health and social care services within communities. The Council and local NHS would then be required to share that resource, and be jointly accountable for performance against the charter. That would avoid complicated staff transfer issues and would allow care professionals to get on with the job – caring for people with support needs.

- In the longer term, a review of policy, practice, funding, roles and earlier intervention is required. We will have to examine the provision of care and the role of the state.



The political agenda at Holyrood is that adult care services should be run by the NHS... we think differently.



Our communities value local democracy. Taking social care away from local government would weaken the voice of communities across Scotland about the type of care they want.

EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Scotland has a proud history of local education which goes back to the 17th century. Universal education was established by an Act of the Scottish Parliament, but has always been delivered at the local level in collaboration with local people. This remains the situation as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. We believe that the strong foundations of Scottish education, namely that all children are entitled to go to a good school no matter their background or where they live, and that all local people have an equal say in how schools are run through the local ballot box, have never been more important.

At this election Scottish education will come under the microscope like never before. We fear that in order to justify their party's policy and to show it differs from rivals, some will suggest that Scotland's schools are not performing well. Some may also try to over simplify the debate by suggesting policies like class size reduction, or that increasing the teacher numbers will lead directly to improvement. If this happens, candidates to the Scottish Parliament risk undermining people's faith in a system that is delivering results, and risk promising changes that will not deliver the improvement needed.

Thanks to the dedication of teachers and other professionals, the Scottish education system is working, and the high quality of Scottish education is evidenced by both domestic and international research. Indeed the Scottish Parliament's own Education Committee stated in March this year that the Scottish system is not broken and is not in urgent need of repair. Our manifesto aims to redress the balance and speak up for what Scotland is doing well.

So what would we do?

We are asking prospective MSPs to focus on the single greatest challenge facing our education system - the gap in life chances between our highest and lowest achievers.

We know from research that in Scotland background and family circumstances have a bigger impact on life chances than school. Scottish schools are good but social problems such as poverty, deprivation, parental drug and alcohol abuse damage too many children's potential. Children must be ready to learn and have a nurturing and supporting environment at home. It is clear that as hard as teachers and schools work, this challenge cannot be fixed simply by what goes on in the class room.

Closing the equality gap is a massive challenge. The change that is needed is complex and multifaceted and is not easily debated in the cut and thrust of an election campaign. However, it is local government services like social work, housing, adult and community learning, and councils' links to the NHS, voluntary and charitable sector that will make the difference.

We therefore want to be able to press ahead with, and step up the pace of change that is happening right now in local authorities. We want to continue to personalise the learning experience of pupils, provide the broadest range of experiences for learners, and bring together services for children at the local level. This change will continue to place demands on local authorities and on the professionals that local government employs, but it must happen because it is essential for the lives of children.

We cannot achieve this without the support of Parliament and Scottish Government which is why over the next 4 years we need stability and national leadership focused on accelerating improvements in outcomes for children and young people. If we continue to do the right things we can start to close the education equality gap. If we are distracted by proposals that are not evidenced, then this gap will grow and we will put at risk the ethos of equality for all which is at the heart of Scottish comprehensive education.



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Strong Evidence...

Strong Conclusions

The public sector reform debate in Scotland will either win headlines but fail to deliver a coherent reform process, or it could follow another trajectory, where long-term, multi-layered issues are considered against an overarching objective to improve outcomes across Scotland's communities.

The current political climate currently points to the former, short-termist approach winning out, but that is not a position that COSLA can support, and nor should others. However, we have a choice. COSLA's manifesto draws on evidence, fundamental principles of democracy, and a steadfast commitment to improve outcomes. Our conclusions are equally strong:

SCOTLAND NEEDS REAL REFORM, NOT REORGANISATION

Centralisation is not the panacea. Instead, we need a reform process that looks at the whole of the public sector not individual parts, and looks at systems not structures. We are calling on national politicians not to push through populist reforms – these risk real and lasting damage to people and communities. What we know for sure is that successive, ill-thought-through proposals for reform have cost money, taken time, and delivered very little added value – so why do it again? Instead, reform must focus on improving outcomes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND SHOULD BE EMPOWERED, NOT UNDERMINED

Local government is best positioned to improve outcomes for Scotland's communities, and to do so in genuinely democratic and accountable ways. That means investing in prevention services not crisis intervention. With resources under pressure, the need to invest in outcomes is more pressing than ever before. A return to input measures and ring fencing risks catastrophic impacts on Scotland's communities.

Bypassing local authorities through centralised health, education and police reforms will undermine accountability in Scotland and damage the protection afforded to communities. In return, history tells us that we can expect little or no financial returns, despite huge upheaval.

SCOTLAND NEEDS AN HONEST AND MATURE DEBATE ABOUT THE FINANCIAL SITUATION FACING PUBLIC SERVICES

Rather than repeat the mistakes of our recent history, we can steer a different course towards public service reform. There needs to be an honest and mature debate around the affordability and sustainability of some current policies. That means no knee jerk policy initiatives and a real recognition that the financial and demand pressures upon us require a different approach to reform.



“Local government is the voice of local people.

Protecting politics and democracy means empowering local government, not undermining it”

COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is the representative voice of Scottish local government, lobbying on behalf of our members – Scotland's 32 councils



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