



MacKay Hannah Speech - COSLA President, Councillor Alison Evison

Good afternoon everyone; thank you for your warm welcome and for inviting me to be with you all here today.

I would like to thank the Minister for his remarks.

Throughout the process of the Local Governance Review, the Scottish Government and Local Government have been working in close partnership, as we seek to gather views on the governance of the public sector across Scotland.

The process has confirmed what we already knew; that the spheres of Local and National Government share an ambition to focus on and strengthen local decision making in a way that improves the outcomes for all of Scotland's communities.

The Local Governance Review presents a unique opportunity for us to further empower our communities, and to improve democratic governance across the country.

When we launched the review late last year, I was determined that this would truly be the start of a new way of thinking in Scotland.

For too long it has been assumed that bigger is better, and the centre always knows best. However, we cannot continue to work under the premise that 'one size fits all'. It doesn't. What works for our communities here in Edinburgh won't always work for rural communities such as those close to the area I represent in Aberdeenshire, just as the priorities on our islands won't be the same as in our cities.

Change will require all of us to work together – communities, the third sector, national and local government. And that's why this review has been particularly focused on ensuring that all voices and all views are heard as effectively as possible.

Naturally, councils are a big part of the picture, but so too are the various public services that people rely on every day and the third sector which in so many places both provides a safety net for people and inspires communities to new opportunities. That is something I will come back to again later.

I am looking forward to what we can achieve together; focussing on local places, local communities, strengthening local democracy and, ensuring people are able to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect them.

The process...

You are aware that in December last year COSLA and the Scottish Government jointly launched the Local Governance Review.

The review is being conducted through two separate, yet interwoven, strands.

Strand 1

As you will have heard today, the first strand has focussed on a programme of community engagement

That is being delivered through a highly inclusive dialogue taking place around the country and includes community councils, third sector organisations, community development trusts, community anchor organisations, and of course residents.

We wanted to make sure that this strand was coordinated by as diverse a group as possible.

That is why we've worked hard to bring together an alliance that covered as many elements of civic life in Scotland as we could.

This meant reaching out to National and Local Government, the health sector, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and key areas of expertise.

This 'Enabling Group' as it became known, worked to complement the already significant ways in which councils and other public services were engaging with their local communities, and we look forward to hearing the results of their work.

As the Minister said in his remarks, conversations have been taking place up and down the country. They have been organised within communities and have taken place locally with specific groups of young people, care users, community councils, ethnic groups and development partnerships.

This approach has allowed us to hear directly from people across our communities about what they wanted to achieve from the review.

It will allow us to explore how democratic governance could better deliver outcomes for everyone at local level.

It will allow us to consider what factors make it easier for people to participate locally and to consider more deeply the barriers to participation – organisational, cultural, barriers around accessibility and communication. And it would be remiss of me in this year - not to mention gender.

Strand 2

The second strand, launched jointly by myself, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, and the Deputy First Minister in June involves opening a dialogue with Scotland's councils, Community Planning Partnerships, regional groupings, city regions and other public-sector organisations, to identify different and new powers or ways of working that could improve outcomes, reduce inequalities, and improve democracy locally.

In June, council Leaders agreed on COSLA's approach to the second phase of the review. This focussed on two components.

Firstly, individual local authorities would develop specific submissions to the Review based on their local circumstances and priorities.

COSLA's role is to look across these and work to create a common view from the local government community around key themes emanating from individual authorities' local 'asks', and national aspects of reform such as fiscal empowerment, powers and other issues.

We're ambitious about what can be achieved, and we've put in place a 'Special Interest Group' involving the leaders of each of the political groups to take that forward. We're also

delighted to be supported in that by James Mitchell, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh, whom you heard from earlier today.

We already know that there are a number of core themes now emerging, as you heard about from James.

Our target is to provide an overall submission for review which can be agreed by all Councils in late January - no small task, but one that we are working very hard on.

And without giving too much away, what is already clear is that a joined- up approach to change is needed - community empowerment, functional empowerment, and fiscal empowerment.

Across Local Government considerable work is taking place to develop positions locally, often through local working groups, or through the Community Planning Partnership, and all public services have been requested to share submissions by 14 December. It is crucial to the effective outcome of this work, that all public services and the third sector contribute.

With submissions now being finalised, COSLA has also developed a programme of workshops to explore and share the ideas or proposals that are emerging from the local government community and our key partners. If you haven't already signed up to one of these please do so - more details are on the COSLA website: www.cosla.gov.uk

Where to go from here...

The review has been a significant process and we are not quite at the finish line yet.

We knew that if we wanted to approach governance in a new and exciting way then communities had to have a say in their local public services and in the essential services they access daily.

That's why we need to ensure that local government is empowered to deliver all of that potential as effectively as possible, - empowered democratically and empowered financially.

But that is only part of the story.

For of course, as I mentioned at the beginning of this speech, this is a Review of Local Governance, not Local Government.

It will simply not deliver if all parts of the public sector do not engage equally as energetically and ambitiously as local government is.

And of course, that also means looking at how powers can be pushed down as far as they can be across our democratic system - from councils to communities, but also from Scottish Government to Local Government.

Our priority is the devolution of powers to the most appropriate place.

It's well accepted that Scotland is on many measures one of the most centralised countries in Europe - this review is an unprecedented opportunity to turn that around.

As our first round of engagement has drawn to a close, we are aware of what is ahead of us. We want everybody to have had their say and to feel they have had their say. We will make sure that they are now listened to.

So, if you haven't already engaged in the review - now is the time to do so.

The immediate next step will be a full and frank analysis of everything that has been submitted thus far.

COSLA, together with our partners in the Scottish Government, will consider closely all the evidence that we have received. That is a joint political process - and I think a real credit to the effective partnership that both Local Government and the Scottish Government are keen to nurture.

A partnership that can only bring benefits to all our communities.

What happens next will be shaped by what our communities, our citizens, and all of Scotland's local public services have brought to the table.

We are excited by both the level of engagement and by the passion brought forward during this review.

The proposals I have already heard have been wide ranging and innovative, but also grounded in reality, and appreciative of values of equality and inclusion. Making sure they can be realised will require change across our system of governance - COSLA is committed to that, and I, for one, look forward to what can be achieved.

It has been a pleasure to be with you here today. Thank you for inviting me.