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# Inside COSLA

*The Local Government Monthly Communication*



for  
**Inclusive  
Growth**



to  
**Tackle  
Inequalities**



for  
**Prosperous  
Communities**

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# Welcome

## Welcome to the second edition of our elected members' communication - Inside COSLA.

During the past month I had the welcome opportunity to visit two of our member councils – **West Lothian** and **South Ayrshire**. These visits are an opportunity to hear the views of councillors across the country. I also try to use these visits to describe how COSLA works and to convey our role to those elected members who may have limited interaction with the work that we do. These visits are an essential part of my calendar and help me represent the interests of our member councils.



Brexit, of course, continues to dominate the political agenda and we are doing everything we can to coordinate Local Government's response to our exit from the EU. I attend the weekly **Scottish Government Resilience Room** meetings and in recent weeks have had the opportunity to press the Government over how Brexit will impact our local transport links and our local economies.

Last week I was delighted to launch the annual **COSLA Excellence Awards**. These awards highlight the projects across Local Government that are setting new standards of excellence and help spread their creativity and impact. We want to award those who are finding new ways to transform local services, improve outcomes, and reduce inequalities. That means that we're interested in any project that is making a difference locally. Whatever the focus, to be a finalist you'll need to clearly explain what your project is about, why it is innovative, and of course, the difference it is making, or is set to make in future. I look forward to reading everyone's applications.

Our March **Convention** saw councillors from across Scotland arrive in East Lothian. This is one of the most important dates in the COSLA calendar as it allows a wider group of members, who reflect the political make-up of every council, to come together and set the strategic direction of our work.

I hope you enjoy this second edition. Our task as your representatives is not only to stand up for councils to the Government, to the media and to others, but also to communicate our successes to you.

**COSLA President Councillor Alison Evison**



# Convention and Leaders' Recap

## **COSLA Presidential Team Councillor Alison Evison & Councillor Graham Houston**

Our Convention and Leaders' meetings took place in Musselburgh on March 29th.

Council Leaders discussed a wide range of issues from agreeing to put a new pay settlement to the teaching workforce, which concludes this year's pay negotiations for all four bargaining Groups, to the Scottish Welfare Fund.



Convention is where Councillors from across Scotland, including Leaders, meet to set COSLA's strategic direction. It is COSLA's main governance group.

Provost of East Lothian Council, Councillor John McMillan opened Convention. His speech focussed on the essential role that councillors play, and how their decisions can have a critical impact on those whom they represent. Other issues discussed by Convention included the National Performance Framework, EU Exit, and COSLA budget approval.

Councillor Kelly Parry and Councillor Elena Whitham, who have made a trailblazing response to maternity leave over the past year, sought confirmation from Leaders that they could continue their 80/20 split of the Community Wellbeing role.

Our next Leaders meeting will take place on Friday 26th April and will return to our regular meeting place of the COSLA building at Verity House Edinburgh.



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# Spokespersons' Update

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## Resources

### **COSLA Spokesperson**

### **Councillor Gail Macgregor**

#### **Housing Benefit**

COSLA has written to the UK Treasury on concerns we have about the sustainability of Scottish Local Authorities delivery of Housing Benefit and supporting the UK Benefits system. We are looking for the Treasury and the Department of Work and Pensions to properly fund the Benefits services delivered by local authorities in the forthcoming UK Spending Review.



#### **Town Centre Funding**

We have also written to the Treasury seeking a joint approach to funding town centres in Scotland through their stronger towns funding. We have raised concerns that the Treasury are proposing a bid process, which means that Scottish Councils are having to compete for funding with English and Welsh Councils. This goes against our well established governance arrangements to ensure funding goes where it is needed.

#### **Gypsy/Traveller Site Funding**

Following agreement by COSLA Leaders, COSLA's Local Government Finance Team is working with the Migration, Population and Diversity Team to better protect Gypsy/Travellers' rights and strengthen support for Local Government in this area. In particular, we are currently seeking to establish the costs to councils of increasing and improving the quality of provision of permanent Gypsy/Traveller sites.

# Children and Young People

**COSLA Spokesperson**  
**Councillor Stephen McCabe**



## **Instrumental Music Tuition**

COSLA worked closely with the Scottish Government and the Music Education Partnership Group to produce guidance for local authorities on charging policies. This included good practice and a commitment from all authorities not to charge fees for children and young people eligible for Free School Meals or those taking SQA examinations.

## **Headteachers' Charter**

COSLA, in partnership with key stakeholders, circulated an agreed draft of the Headteachers' Charter and system empowerment diagram to all schools in Scotland. This represents the next stage in implementing the 'Joint Agreement on Education Reform' and demonstrates real progress towards a collaborative approach to ensuring empowerment at all levels in our education system.

## **Learning Estate Strategy**

COSLA will be working in partnership with Scottish Government to develop a new learning estate strategy and investment programme. The Learning Estate Strategy will set out a joint vision for our learning estate of the future. This Strategy will connect people, places and learning, be that physically, digitally, through practice or communication. Collectively we will work to ensure that all our young people are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential.





# Community Wellbeing

**COSLA Spokesperson**

**Councillor Kelly Parry**



## **Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory Budgeting is a way for people to have a direct say in how local money is spent and at least 1% of local government budgets will be decided through Participatory Budgeting by the end of 2021.

Playing a key role in empowering local communities, services and democracy, COSLA established a national digital Participatory Budgeting pilot. Currently 16 authorities are working in partnership with the Scottish Government, the Digital Office and Improvement Service.

## **Scottish Welfare Fund**

On the Scottish Welfare Fund we are re-engaging with the Scottish Government to open up discussions on funding and support arrangements that will be needed to continue to deliver an effective service in all local authority areas.

## **Police Conveners Forum**

It was good to chair a recent meeting of the COSLA Police Scrutiny Conveners Forum. It was well attended by elected members and we also had Susan Deacon, Chair of the Scottish Police Authority and Chief Constable of Police Scotland Iain Livingstone with other senior police officers. Some pressing issues were discussed around data sharing when protecting those subject to domestic abuse as well as safety certifications of football grounds.



# Health and Social Care

## Interim COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Stuart Currie

### Keys to Life Strategy

The Keys to Life Strategy recognises that people who have a learning disability have the same aspirations and expectations as everyone else. COSLA launched a refreshed implementation framework with Scottish Government Ministers on 13th March. This framework emphasises Local Government's commitment to enabling those with disabilities to play a full part in their communities and live independent lives free from bullying, fear and harassment.



### Health and Social Care Integration Review

COSLA along with partners in Health and Social Care undertook a review of integration progress. We have been clear that the review proposals are there to support a meaningful conversation at the local level about how we take integration to the next stage. COSLA have developed an implementation plan with our key partners and will continue to demonstrate to the Ministerial Strategy Group and elected members the progress that we are making.

### Public Health Reform

A new body is being developed to support and enable the wider public health system. The Public Health Reform team have been speaking to Community Planning Partnerships about what they can expect from the new Public Health body as we work to improve the entire system. COSLA are working to ensure that Local Government's voice is being heard as we launch our public health consultation over the coming weeks.



# Environment and Economy

**COSLA Spokesperson**  
**Councillor Steven Heddle**



## **Regeneration Capital Grant Fund**

For 2019/20 the joint COSLA and Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund has awarded 18 projects a share of £20.4 million to support local regeneration projects that involve local communities, helping to support and create jobs and build sustainable communities.

## **Town Centre Fund**

The Town Centre Fund, set up in partnership with COSLA, is supporting councils to ensure their high streets are more diverse, sustainable and successful in the face of changing and evolving retail patterns. Local authorities now have access to a share of a £50m fund aimed to improve struggling town centres.

## **Transport (Scotland) Bill**

COSLA's evidence was widely featured in the Stage 1 Report on this Bill. Specifically COSLA voiced the concerns of Scotland's councils in relation to bus services and parking issues. Stage 2 will see the introduction of an amendment on the Workplace Parking Levy.





Scotland is a diverse place, and strong local democracy really does matter to people's lives. As the national voice of Local Government, one of COSLA's key roles is to champion strong local democracy and local services, and effective participation in decision making. This is reflected across every dimension of policy work, as well as specific projects within the 'Democracy and Reform' priority set out in the COSLA Plan 2017-22.

In making the voice of local people heard across all public services through devolved decision making, we can address the huge social and financial costs of persistent inequality in this country. Much of this ambition is captured in the work we started jointly with the Scottish Government, at the end of 2017, on the Local Governance Review.

For the first time, this Review is looking at the changes that are needed across all public services, and local and national Government, to give communities more say in decisions that impact on them.

As part of our work on this, COSLA is promoting 3 key inter-related "dimensions" of reform across Community Empowerment, Functional Empowerment, and Fiscal Empowerment. It is clear that the 3 strands of empowerment – community, functional and fiscal – must be delivered together and that collaboration across sectors and spheres of government is a necessity not an option.

Following extensive engagement and consultation, the Review is now moving into the next phase, developing proposals to deliver the changes that are needed across all public services, and local and national Government, to give communities more say in decisions that impact on them. On behalf of Local Government, COSLA continues to lead this work in partnership with Scottish Government.

COSLA will of course continue to champion the interests of Local Government and our communities throughout the Review.

# Local Government and Brexit

## HOW COSLA IS HELPING COUNCILS PREPARE FOR BREXIT

The potential for a no deal Brexit remains and COSLA is working, at political and official levels, with all our member councils, UK local authority associations, and UK and Scottish Governments to identify, manage and mitigate the risks to services and our local communities. We have now secured a place alongside the Local Government Association on the UK Ministerial EU Exit Local Government Delivery Board and our Presidential Team and Spokespersons continue working to ensure the voice of Scottish Local Government is heard.



The Scottish Government Resilience Room arrangements are now well established, and the President or Vice-President currently attend weekly meetings.

COSLA officers have worked with SOLACE and Directors of Finance to seek initial support of £50,000 per council from Scottish Government to help local resilience coordination. In addition, a broader exercise to identify costs to councils of the ongoing UK exit process has also begun.

COSLA is supporting councils to ensure that Local Government is adequately prepared for Brexit, particularly should there be no deal. An ongoing example is Export Health certificating where new practice and further resources will be required. Ministers have indicated support for such resourcing where we evidence the need.

The Communications Team within COSLA are working with Scottish and UK Governments on core messaging around the implications of UK Exit. Work so far has been around very specific issues and signposting to guidance. The intention is to ensure that all councils have access to the same information and advice to allow them to appropriately advise individuals and organisations/businesses who contact them with concerns.

COSLA are looking to the future and the March COSLA Convention agreed that a scoping exercise of COSLA and Scottish Local Government's future international engagement opportunities will be undertaken over the next few months.

**This work will continue to take place as things develop to ensure Local Government needs are understood and addressed as best we can.**

**For more information on COSLA and Brexit please visit our website:**

**<http://www.cosla.gov.uk/about/cosla-europe/brexit>**

**COSLA's monthly communication is designed to update all of Scotland's elected members on our efforts to improve local services and strengthen local democracy. If you want a future issue to focus on an area of our work you want to hear more about, please contact [communications@cosla.gov.uk](mailto:communications@cosla.gov.uk)**