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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 our first edition of our elected members' communication - Inside COSLA.

COSLA prides itself on being a councillor-led, cross-party organisation. In the short time in which I have been President I have visited councils across the country. Wherever I go, our elected members ask us to keep them informed of the successes that COSLA has achieved on their behalf.

We have listened to your views and now COSLA will provide a monthly communication straight to your inbox. Here you will find details of how COSLA has been championing the role of Local Government to the media, to the Parliament and to the Scottish Government. In future issues we'll look at our work in Europe and with the UK Government.

For too many of Scotland's councillors, COSLA can seem like a distant organisation, to which the realities of service delivery aren't as familiar as they are to our colleagues across the 32 councils. That's why we've included a section on 'How COSLA Works' to convey that it is Scotland's elected members who drive everything that we do.

I hope you enjoy this first edition of Inside COSLA and I look forward to highlighting all the achievements of the Local Government family over the coming editions.

COSLA President Councillor Alison Evison



How COSLA works

We're a politically-led, cross-party organisation.

That means that what we do, and how we do it, is decided democratically by elected councillors from across our member councils.

Our decision making system is therefore designed to put member councils at the heart of the policy development process.

Led by our President, Vice President, and five spokespersons, our decisions are made in the following ways:

1

Convention

This is where the strategic direction of the organisation is set. Members reflect the political make-up of every council in COSLA and meet twice a year, in March and October, to set COSLA's priorities

2

Leaders

Council Leaders from Scotland's 32 local authorities meet eight times a year, on the last Friday of the month, to focus on delivering the priorities set at Convention. They also debate and agree COSLA's approach in key areas.

3

Policy Boards

Decisions on specific services are then taken by each of our themed Boards. Each of these is chaired by a Spokesperson, put forward by the political parties, and includes a representative from every member council. They meet up to six times a year.

4

COSLA Teams

Policy is set by the 32 Councils through Leaders and Policy Boards and delivery is then carried out by COSLA officers who work closely with the Presidential team and Spokespersons to inform and empower local decision making and enable councils to do what works locally.



Leaders' Recap

COSLA Presidential Team Councillor Alison Evison & Councillor Graham Houston

At our most recent Leaders' on February 22nd, Scotland's Councils debated a range of issues covering a post-Brexit immigration system, improving the lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers, the Planning Bill and the Local Government Settlement.

We were delighted to welcome our guest speakers Kathy Townsley-McGuigan, Rochelle McGavin, David Donaldson and Dominique Barr. The speakers were invited to share their experiences as members of the Gypsy/Travellers community in Scotland and to highlight some of the key issues of concern. David Donaldson then went on to deliver a presentation identifying suggestions as to how this situation could be improved including; on-site engagement and regular maintenance and consideration of literacy levels within the engagement process.

We also heard from Councillor Elena Whitham on the the proposed changes to the UK immigration system post-Brexit. Leaders noted the proposals in the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill and UK's future skills-based immigration system White Paper; and endorsed COSLA's ongoing lobbying and engagement activities for a post-Brexit immigration system that can meet Scottish Local Government's needs.

Our next meeting will take place at our Convention on Friday 29th March where our colleagues at East Lothian Council will host councillors from across Scotland



Spokespersons' Update



Resources

COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Gail Macgregor

Spending Review

COSLA ran a pro-active campaign around the meaningful impact our essential services make to communities throughout Scotland. On a cross party basis we engaged with Scottish Government and all political parties to highlight the essential services provided by local authorities across the country and the importance of investing in Local Government.

This included the document Fair Funding for Essential Services 2019/20 which was launched in November. This was regularly highlighted in Parliament during Debates and received significant media coverage. I also gave evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee which was a positive session and resulted in our key messages being picked up by the Committee.

Local Government was a key feature of the Budget Debate. I will look forward to realising the commitments which have been made on COSLA's asks for discretionary taxation, Council Tax Reform and the development of a Fiscal Framework and achieving the empowerment of local democracy these can bring. I will work with both Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to take forward these key areas.



Children and Young People

COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Stephen McCabe

Education Joint Agreement

In the face of a proposed approach by the Scottish Government to remove powers from Local Government, we achieved a joint agreement between the Scottish Government and COSLA on school empowerment, collaboration, parental involvement, engagement and pupil participation.

Early Learning and Childcare

By 2021/22, Councils will be provided with around £550m annually to deliver the expansion of early learning and childcare, transforming the life chances of children in Scotland. Focusing on the priorities agreed by Leaders, COSLA ensured that this expansion is being delivered in partnership with Scottish Government and is fully funded.

Educational Psychologists

Reflecting feedback from our members that there were significant gaps in educational psychologists across the country, COSLA secured a new funding package to ensure an increase in number of trainees.



Community Wellbeing

COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Kelly Parry

Homelessness Prevention Strategy

COSLA successfully agreed with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders to deliver the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Advisory Group recommendations via the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group.

Children's Funeral Charges

COSLA successfully secured Scottish Government funding for local authorities to remove their part of children's funeral charges on a consistent basis across the country.

Scottish Employability Partnership Framework:

COSLA and Scottish Government have jointly signed off an agreement 'No One Left Behind' on aligning and integrating employability services in Scotland which is flexible, person centred and more straightforward for people to navigate.



Health and Social Care

Interim COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Stuart Currie

Public Health

COSLA have secured agreement that the Minister and COSLA Spokesperson will jointly appoint the Chair and CEO of Public Health Scotland. The new body will be jointly accountable to COSLA and Scottish Ministers to ensure that Scottish Local Government is equally influential in the development of the Public Health space.

Health and Social Care Integration

COSLA Leaders recommended a continued commitment to health and social care integration and enabled us to jointly oversee implementation of the review alongside Scottish Government.

Mental Health

Scottish Government and COSLA have jointly commissioned a Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce to take practical action to address this issue.



Environment and Economy

COSLA Spokesperson Councillor Steven Heddle

Planning Bill

COSLA lobbied hard for removal of the penalty clause, which limited the fees planning authorities could charge if deemed to be under performing, as this has been a long-term objective of Local Government.

Crown Estate Bill

COSLA has been working to secure devolution of the management of the Crown Estate to Local Authorities for a number of years. The recently passed Crown Estate Act, which was a key priority, is a step to achieving this long term goal. Much work now remains to turn devolution into reality through the implementation of the legislation.

Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF)

A total of 24 projects were awarded funding in 2018/19 as part of the joint COSLA and Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF). This fund supports projects that engage and involve local communities in disadvantaged areas, tackle inequality and support inclusive growth.



When COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson Councillor Kelly Parry was due to go on maternity leave, COSLA still required somebody to speak up on issues of community wellbeing in her absence. Councillor Elena Whitham takes us through what it has been like to be a Spokesperson this past year.



It has been a great privilege to play a part in COSLA's trailblazing response to councillor maternity provision as Interim Community Wellbeing Spokesperson. If we are to truly make Local Government reflective of the communities they serve, addressing maternity leave and flexible working practices are key. It has been great to help set up the new Removing Barriers to Elected Office special interest group, Chaired by Cllr Alison Evison, the COSLA President to ensure we keep driving equality of opportunity forward.

It has truly been a whirlwind year and several key pieces of work I have been involved in include; co-chairing the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group with Kevin Stewart MSP to ensure all recommendations from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group are taken forward as both spheres of government and the third sector strive to eradicate homelessness in Scotland for good; facilitating group workshops on harnessing the real devolution of power and community empowerment that Participatory Budgeting delivers; and developing a human rights based approach to delivering meaningful and lasting improvements to the lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers who continue to experience persistent and enduring marginalisation and stigma.

The role of Spokesperson is both rewarding and challenging and I hope I have served COSLA well. I look forward to continuing to be part of the Community Wellbeing Board as we champion Local Government's invaluable role in serving and empowering our communities.

**COSLA Interim Community Wellbeing
Spokesperson Councillor Elena Whitham**

Local Government and Brexit

HOW COSLA IS HELPING COUNCILS PREPARE FOR BREXIT

COSLA, SOLACE and the Local Government Family are leading a joined-up approach to supporting preparation for the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. This is a priority area as we need to ensure that Local Authorities can continue to deliver the essential services our communities rely on and almost every aspect of our work will be affected in one way or another.



The ongoing fluidity of the political situation makes this a complex and time-consuming task. It is imperative that a broad range of work is undertaken to ensure we are as prepared as we can be. Some of the crucial work we are undertaking include:

- The COSLA President represents Scottish local government at the Scottish Government's weekly Resilience Room meeting, hosted by the Deputy First Minister. Our voice is seen as vital in the preparation and planning for service delivery in the event of a no-deal Brexit.
- Supporting councils in their resilience response at a national level, recognising that some concerns are universal and others are pertinent to specific areas or communities but all are vital.
- Sharing data and information to partners and across councils to ensure that we are joined up in our thinking and in our decision making. This has been done through a joint survey with SOLACE, individual meetings with councils and through hosting a preparedness seminar with all Local Authorities. This has allowed us to identify what support Local Authorities require from COSLA, the Scottish and the UK Governments on how best to support their local communities through the Brexit process.
- Engaging with key civic society stakeholders through the Strategic Stakeholders Group.
- Ensuring that the Scottish Local Government voice is heard at committees and meetings with various ministers and cabinet secretaries.

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>

CHAMPIONING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

COSLA's Image, Media and Communications Team are responsible for all COSLA's communications work – from media briefings to press liaisons. So far this year our work has focussed on supporting COSLA's negotiations with the Scottish Government over the Local Government Settlement. We have also been working alongside colleagues in the Scottish Government to make sure that the public are receiving consistent and appropriate messaging regarding 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