

**COSLA BRIEFING**  
in relation to **Scottish Government's Statement on school staff and minimum learning hours**

7<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**Key Messages**

- **Prior to the announcement of the draft budget, COSLA was clear that Local Government faced pressures of £1bn. In the draft budget for 2023/24 there is only an additional £71m in the 2023/24 budget to meet this gap.**

**Councils are committed to tackling the poverty related attainment gap, which is why Councillors do not relish having to make any reductions to services, but they are faced with tough choices when the financial envelope is reduced.**

- **Councils need the ability to make balanced choices to protect the wide range of services that support children and young people's attainment, health and wellbeing - teachers are a key part of this but so too are wider services like social work support, youth work, libraries and cultural services.**
- **The introduction of any new financial sanctions and legislation will not stop cuts to the vital support that children and young people need, only displace them into other services.**
- **This late intervention is not compatible with the Deputy First Minister's stated intention of a 'new deal for Local Government' based on partnership working.**

**Background**

- We understand the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is set to make a statement to Parliament this week. Whilst we do not know the detail of what Ministers are proposing, we know that they have indicated publicly the intention to use financial sanctions and new legislation to limit options for councils as they set very challenging budgets.
- COSLA has taken part in discussions with the Scottish Government, both with Ministers and officials, to understand their concerns whilst setting out that Councils are struggling to maintain services against monumental financial pressures.

**Investment of £145.5m in 2022/23**

- Councils have invested the £145.5m provided by the Scottish Government in both teachers, pupil support staff and pay.

- The figures on teacher numbers, drawn from the teacher census, show only a partial, snapshot and do not demonstrate the full picture. Importantly, the Scottish Government and COSLA did not agree to use the census as the benchmark to monitor the use of the £145.5m.
- Today, the COSLA Resources and Children and Young People Spokespeople have written to the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee providing evidence of continued investment in school support staff, and in relation to the ongoing recruitment.
- However, COSLA is clear that the £145.5m funding provided by Scottish Government only accounts for a very small proportion of the funding required to pay the 56,000 teachers in Scotland. The vast majority of teachers are funded from core Local Government budgets, which have seen a real terms reduction over the last 10 years.

### **Draft Scottish Budget for 2023/24 and impact on Education**

- Councils have consistently protected education as the overall funding from the Scottish Government has decreased. As a result of protections in education (and social care) cuts have fallen disproportionately on other service areas. A recent publication by the independent [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (IFS) highlighted that councils' spending on early years childcare and schools has increased in real terms during the 2010s (an estimated increase of around 19% between 2009/10 and 2021/22), whilst spending on other council services fell substantially over the same period.
- Before the budget, COSLA set out its [Budget SOS](#) campaign, highlighting pressures of at least £1bn for Local Government in 2023/24 (due to inflation, rising energy costs, pay and increased demand) unless more funding is provided.
- '[Education SOS](#)' warned that if education services had to take their 'fair share' of these financial pressures, around £500m of savings would need to be found – equating to 8,500 fewer teachers, or 16,000 less pupil support staff.
- COSLA's [Budget Reality](#) highlights that Local Government will see just a £71m cash increase in 2023/24, once already agreed policy commitments are taken into account – this means only £71m to deal with inflation and pay across the entire Local Government, nowhere near the £1bn required.

### **Impact of further restrictions on local budget setting**

- Local Government's commitment to tackling the poverty related attainment gap remains absolute, and was demonstrated in our ['stretch aims' set for the Scottish Attainment Challenge](#).
- None of our member councils relish having to make any reductions to services, particularly those that support children and young people. However, as set out above, the settlement for Local Government means councillors are faced with tough choices.
- Improving attainment requires support from a wide range of local services. We place immense value on of teachers and their crucial role in realising our ambitions. However, if new restriction on council budgets are introduced, it will require disproportionate reductions in services such as social work support, early years, education psychology, youth work, libraries and cultural activities that are vital to support children and young people and enable improved attainment and achievement.

- This point is also emphasised in the [IFS report](#), which states that the “*planned moratorium on reducing the number of teachers and school hours, mean that the pressure would likely be particularly keenly felt in the one-third of councils’ budgets that is allocated to other services. This is in the context of councils’ culture, environmental, housing, planning and economic development, and transport services being cut back the most during the 2010s.*”
- Councils need the ability to make locally appropriate choices to protect the wide range of services that support children and young people’s attainment, health and wellbeing.

## Partnership working

- In November 2022, in response to his commitment to consider the scope for flexibilities to support the funding gap councils face as a result of the 2022/23 pay deal, the Deputy First Minister wrote to Councils to confirm that “*it is for individual councils, as democratically elected bodies, to consider the needs of their communities with a focus on the most vulnerable, their legal obligations and the totality of resource funding available to them, and to then take the decisions necessary, openly and transparently, to operate as effectively as possible within this context.*”
- The letter from the Deputy First Minister to the COSLA President on 15 December 2022, setting out the details of the Local Government settlement for 2023/24, had no mention of any conditions around teacher numbers and learning hours.
- During the initial budget consultation in December, COSLA officers were informed that Scottish Government funding of £32.8m, provided for the teachers’ pay deal in 2021/22, would not be available in 2023/24 and would require to be met from the £145.5m for teachers – this decision was later reversed.
- COSLA had their first discussion on possible measures with the Scottish Government on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023. First official correspondence to COSLA setting out Ministers’ desire for a different approach was received on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023. This has now made developing budgets incredibly hard; the first council is due to set their budget on 16<sup>th</sup> February.
- In December, the Deputy First Minister committed to working with Local Government to create a new relationship as a more ‘*effective way of working together, focused on outcomes that matter to people, with more flexibility, reduced reporting and greater assurance*’. It is difficult to see how this late intervention in councils’ budget setting processes without additional funding is compatible with a new relationship.

## Conclusions

- Local Government regrets that the Scottish Budget has placed them in the position of making difficult decision regarding the delivery of school education.
- Councils are absolutely committed to improving the attainment, health and wellbeing of children and young people across Scotland.
- The introduction of any new sanctions and legislation will not stop cuts to the vital support that children and young people need, only displace them into other services.

- We hope the Scottish Government will continue discussions with COSLA, including considerations of on funding flexibilities and the overall quantum of funding in the Local Government Settlement.