Connecting Scotland - how the Scottish Government and its agencies engage internationally

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) is the representative voice of all Scottish Local Authorities both nationally and internationally. COSLA nominates and supports the local members representing Scotland at the EU Committee of the Regions and at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. We are the Scottish member of the Local Government European representative body the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and we closely work with our sister organisations from other European countries, many of whom are also based alongside COSLA at the House of Municipalities in Brussels.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. COSLA is a keen advocate of the position that European Union legislation should fully respect the local competences and autonomy of Councils in organising and providing local services. In order to contribute to a number of discussions and consultations at Scottish, UK and EU levels a significant piece of evidence has been put together. Its main political recommendations were agreed by the Convention in June 2014.

The below political messages very succinctly and clearly reflect implication our view of the current Scottish and indeed UK approach to EU policy formulation on legislation concerning Local Government:

**COSLA key EU political messages**

**Scottish Government**

1. Scottish Local Authorities should be considered equal partners in developing EU policies and legislation in areas that fall within their competence and affect the services they deliver.

2. Scottish Local Authorities, through COSLA and other representative bodies, should work closely with the Scottish Government in developing a systematic mechanism to assess the impact of EU legislative proposals and legislation on local competences across policy areas.

3. Scottish Local Government needs to be involved on a regular basis in joint policy formulation and development with the Scottish Government. COSLA is aiming to become an equal partner in issue-based working groups with Scottish Government, similar to that already institutionalised in other European countries such as Netherlands, Denmark and Finland.

4. The Scottish Government needs to engage in joint forward planning and work with Scottish Local Government on the Scottish Government’s EU strategy - the Action Plan on European Engagement - in order to adequately cover areas concerning us.

5. Scottish local authorities need to be closely involved in formulating Scottish positions on implementing key EU policies and specific parts of EU legislation.
Scottish Parliament

6. Considering the role of state and devolved parliaments in monitoring subsidiarity, there should be a right for Scottish Local Government (and Scottish Committee of the Regions members) to formally request the Scottish Parliament to launch a subsidiarity check on EU draft legislation directly affecting Scottish councils.

7. Existing arrangements between Scottish MSPs and councillors in the EU Committee of the Regions should be deepened to strengthen a joint Scottish approach.

UK Government

8. COSLA urges the UK Government to put into practice the principles of involving Local Government in Scotland in developing the UK negotiating position on EU legislative proposals reserved to the UK level and covered by the Localism Act 2011 EU Policy Statement.

European Commission

9. Having the main legislative initiative, the European Commission needs to fulfil its EU Treaty obligations. It needs to recognise in a robust way local and regional competences in its pre-legislative consultation procedures, ensuring that these specifically address local impacts. Also the European Commission must ensure that, in the evaluation of the effectiveness of legislation, local governance is actively considered.

European Parliament

10. COSLA seeks to increase the interaction between Scottish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and senior councillors.

11. Scottish Local Government’s collective and concerted action in Europe will best strengthened through regular exchanges between councillors with an active role in EU affairs, through the Scottish Local European Elected Representative group (SLEER).

We remain at the Committee’s disposal to complement any of the above agreed lines as appropriate.

For further information please contact:

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