



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Local Government and Regeneration Committee

**Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener**

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Dear David

Re: Scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft 2014/15 budget

As you will be aware, the Committee clerks wrote to COSLA on 25 July inviting written and oral evidence from COSLA on the Scottish Government's 2014/15 draft budget for our meeting on 30 October 2013. This is an invitation issued annually in terms of the Committee's scrutiny of the draft budget.

This year, in an effort to be more topical, informative and consider the issue in greater depth, the approach the Committee took was threefold. Firstly, we undertook preparatory work by looking at local authorities' savings plans in May 2013, as part of our inquiry into public services reform. Secondly, the remit for our 2014/15 draft budget scrutiny and call for evidence, specifically took the approach of looking back at the impact of the local government settlement since 2011, as well as looking forward to future spending pressures.

Finally, we appreciate that in previous years the timescale for this invitation had posed difficulties for COSLA, especially in light of the fact that a consensus on budget issues would need to be approved through COSLA's governance structures. Therefore, this year, we provided COSLA and other witnesses, with over three months' notice of the invitation for 30 October.

As no response from COSLA had been received to our request by the end of September, the clerks followed up on the invitation with COSLA staff. On 9 October they received a response from Vicky Bibby confirming that COSLA was unable to provide a witness for the meeting on 30 October. Ms Bibby suggested a local

government director of finance, or a SOLACE representative, as an alternative to give evidence in place of COSLA.

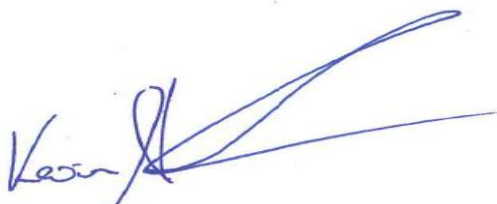
However, the Committee's approach to evidence taking already included these witnesses. The Committee has taken written and oral evidence from several directors of finance at our meeting on 9 October. This was in addition to the evidence directors of finance provided during our pre-budget scrutiny in May 2013. The Chair of SOLACE, Elma Murray, has also accepted an invitation to give evidence on 30 October.

Even so, we still anticipated that COSLA as the representative voice of local government, would wish to contribute views on the overall impact of recent budget settlements, particularly in light of COSLA's current focus on the need to strengthen local democracy and the central role that local government financing plays in this.

I appreciate there are many demands on COSLA's time. However, given COSLA's stated objective to respond quickly to events and set a forward looking agenda for local government, I am both surprised and very disappointed that no one from COSLA is able to give oral evidence to the Committee on 30 October, or indeed any written comment to the Committee on the impact of budget settlements.

I and the Committee remain committed to working constructively with COSLA and the wider local government community in order to add value to the important debates currently underway. I would therefore welcome your comments on COSLA's approach to future engagement with the Committee on the budget process and hope, even at this late stage, COSLA are able to attend on 30 October.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener
Local Government and Regeneration Committee