



Mr Kevin Stewart MSP  
Convener  
Local Government & Regeneration Committee

29<sup>th</sup> October 2013

Dear Kevin

Many thanks for your letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> October on the subject of COSLA giving evidence in respect of your Committee's scrutiny of the Scottish Government's draft 2014/15 budget.

— At the outset, can I say that I understand the threefold approach to this issue outlined in your letter which seems comprehensive and sensible. I also appreciate the thought that has gone into setting timescales which would give COSLA sufficient time to properly consider our contribution to the proposed evidence sessions. It does not go unnoticed' it says a lot about the relationship we have worked to construct between us and it is an approach which will serve us well for future Inquiries.

On the issue of 'who' gives evidence I think it is worth being very clear about the approach we have taken. There has been a consistent approach from us from pre-budget scrutiny in May to now with SOLACE and Directors of Finance. We have asked SOLACE and Directors of Finance to represent us in this inquiry by the Committee because there is a strength in that approach for a number of reasons. They are clearly integral to the local government family and its strategic and corporate view of the financial settlement. They are close to local government political debate and decision making nationally, for example, they are key advisers to COSLA on a range of issues and attend Leaders meetings. Crucially also, given the nature of this inquiry, they are in a good position to use knowledge from Council level to create a national overview for the Committee on areas such as savings plans, efficiencies, and budget pressures.

In other words it is a proactive decision on our part to propose that SOLACE and Directors of Finance represents the views of local government during this Inquiry because we believe the nature of this Inquiry is best served by that approach. There will be other occasions where we believe presenting a full picture and adding value will require both SOLACE, Directors of Finance and COSLA through evidence giving by politicians. Of course that is a judgement. I believe we are best placed to make it as long as we ensure that the Committee does indeed get quality and added value evidence from the local government family but recognising that it is a judgement I'm very happy to have this debate with you either by letter or in person. I would want to reassure you, however, that such judgements are never made lightly, are always given active consideration and are discussed fully each time a request comes in.

Lastly, you state the Committee's commitment to working constructively with COSLA and I would want the Committee to know that COSLA remains equally committed to that objective.

Yours sincerely

Cllr David O'Neill  
President of COSLA

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