

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Finance and Local Government
Leas-Phrìomh Mhinistear agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Ionmhas agus Riaghaltas Ionadail
Jenny Gilruth MSP



Scottish Government
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Craig Hoy MSP
Convener
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
Committee

SJHLG.Committee@parliament.scot

Your ref:
Our ref: A57908261
13th October

Dear Convener,

I was grateful for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee on 9 September 2026 and agreed to follow up, including to provide copies of correspondence to the UK Government, with respect to its approach to asylum and the local connection rule, please find the following letters attached:

- Letter to Home Office on 14 August 2026
- Letter to HM Treasury on 19 August 2026

I also agreed to provide further information as outlined below.

In response to the suggestion of a recognised councillor qualification, the Scottish Government recognises the importance of supporting councillors to develop the knowledge and skills required to undertake their role effectively and ensure elected office is accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds.

Existing support is already available through a range of learning and development opportunities provided by local government partners, including the Councillor Academy, developed by the Improvement Service in partnership with the Open University, and the wider elected member development resources available across local government.

The Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) considered a range of issues relating to councillor recruitment, retention, support and development in its 2024 review. While the Committee highlighted the increasing complexity of the councillor role and the importance of training and development, it did not recommend the creation of a formal qualification for councillors.

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The Scottish Government is also aware of work being taken forward by local government, including through COSLA's Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group, to identify and address the factors that can discourage people from standing for election or remaining in elected office. This work has included consideration of remuneration, candidate support, caring responsibilities, diversity and inclusion, and elected member development.

The Committee's suggestion raises an interesting question about how the skills, knowledge and experience gained through elected office might be more formally recognised. While the Scottish Government does not currently have a policy commitment to introduce a recognised qualification for councillors, we will continue to engage with local government and consider how this suggestion relates to the wider programme of work already under way to support councillors and reduce barriers to elected office, including in the context of our ongoing dialogue on local government reform.

I also agreed to provide further information following the meeting between COSLA group leaders, myself, the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform on 11 September, including any outcomes or next steps relevant to local government reform.

This meeting provided an opportunity for political leaders to discuss the shared challenges facing national and local government and the scope for further reform. On 21 September, the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform and I wrote to the Committee, enclosing a paper setting out the Scottish Government's initial proposals for local governance reform.

As noted in the letter, the paper is intended to support and inform discussions over the coming months with local government, community organisations, Parliament, and the public. It will serve as a basis for engagement and dialogue to help shape the future direction of local governance reform in Scotland.

The paper has now been published on the Scottish Government website and shared with COSLA to support ongoing discussions and engagement - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-sector-reform-proposal/>.

I can also provide the following updates in response to the request for further information on the remit of the Scottish Government's rapid review group on non-domestic rates, including the timescales for its work and when the Parliament can expect it to report.

As I announced on 23 June, an independent panel is being appointed to examine the outcome of the 2026 non-domestic property revaluation following reports of inconsistent valuations. The panel will assess whether there are any anomalies that exist within the revaluation and report within three months of being appointed.

We anticipate that the review will commence shortly and we are also undertaking a comprehensive review of non-domestic rates which builds on our commitment to examine the impact and configuration of all our reliefs in advance of the next revaluation on 1 April 2029. The Minister for Public Finance and I have also commenced a series of engagements with individual businesses. We want to ensure that the system supports economic growth, remains fair and proportionate, and provides sustainable funding for high-quality local services.

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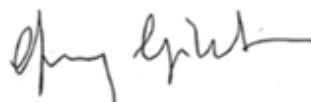
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We will examine improvements and reforms that can be made to the system, working closely with business to ensure the clarity, incentive and transparency which businesses need.

I hope the Committee finds these responses helpful.

Yours sincerely



JENNY GILRUTH

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The Rt Hon Anna Turley MP
Minister for State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

By email: HomeOfficePolicyMP@homeoffice.gov.uk

14 August 2026

Dear Anna,

My officials have informed me today of correspondence sent on 11 August from the Home Office to the Chief Executives of Renfrewshire and Dundee Councils, outlining proposals to utilise two sizable sites in Scotland as asylum dispersal accommodation. I understand the intention is for the site in Dundee to provide 69 bedspaces, with the site in Paisley offering up to 235 bedspaces. This would make it the largest single site in Scotland.

Scottish Government recognises the need to provide safe supported accommodation for people seeking asylum who are fleeing persecution. We agree that long-term use of hotel accommodation is not suitable and that alternatives must be sought.

Scotland has a long history of welcoming refugees and people in need of protection, and this is down to the hard work of the local authorities who welcome people from around the world into their communities. Our approach to supporting refugees and forced migrants is set out in our New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, which places partnership and collaboration as cornerstones of successful integration.

While asylum policy including all asylum accommodation is the responsibility of the UK Government, it is vital that proposals such as these should not be imposed on local communities but should be developed in partnership with local government, delivery partners and communities. I am therefore disappointed at the lack of earlier notification of these plans. It is essential that the UK Government engages early and fully with Scottish and Local Government and that lessons are taken from the experiences of the Cameron Barracks announcement last year.

We stand ready to work constructively with the UK Government to provide safety and sanctuary for people seeking asylum and newly recognised refugees and support integration into our communities. Such collaborate working is the only way to ensure a coherent approach to asylum accommodation is achieved - one which works for both local communities and people seeking asylum.

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I would welcome an urgent discussion with you about the proposals for these sites and how we can successfully support those who seek asylum alongside our local communities.

Yours sincerely,



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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Rt Hon John Healey MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

By email to action.chancellors@hmtreasury.gov.uk

19 August 2026

Dear John,

I appreciated the early opportunity to meet with you alongside the First Minister following your appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. I welcome your commitment to partnership working with Scottish Government and I would therefore welcome further information on how you will engage with devolved governments on the implications of the UK Government's regional devolution proposals, including the allocation of income tax revenue to Mayoral authorities, and how our interests will be incorporated into decision-making.

While I was pleased to learn that the UK Autumn Budget will be in late October, enabling an orderly Budget process in Scotland, I was disappointed that the Scottish Government was not given direct notice of the UK Budget date and instead learned of the announcement through public reporting. While I appreciate that this may reflect previous practice, I would have expected the UK Government's commitment to a more constructive and collaborative working relationship to be reflected in direct notification on a decision with significant implications for the Scottish Budget process.

I hope that your appointment provides an opportunity for the UK Government to consider challenges with a fresh perspective. It is clear that the people who elected us to serve them are struggling with the cost of living. I welcome the initial focus you have brought to this issue but there are a number of further steps I believe you can take to give people that "breathing space".

The current UK Government was, of course, elected on a commitment to reducing energy bills, which have instead risen. The estimated £45 saving from removing VAT on electricity bills will be quickly eroded if the energy price cap increases again in October because of international events. A longer-term and more sustainable approach to reducing energy bills is therefore long overdue.

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Additional targeted support for those in greatest need will also be essential ahead of winter. The Scottish Government shared [detailed proposals](#) with the UK Government last year, I would urge you to give these careful consideration.

With a fresh approach at the Treasury, I would also invite you to address the harmful policies that have been continued in recent years, and which are actively pushing families into poverty and hardship. This includes ending the freeze to Local Housing Allowance rates, lifting the bedroom tax, the benefit cap and the 'young parent penalty' in Universal Credit. In addition, I would like to raise the impact that equal pay pressures are having on councils across all devolved nations and the damaging financial impact that this is having on communities across the UK. Furthermore, UK government Home Office policies are creating serious pressures on local authorities for which urgent financial assistance must be provided. Scottish Ministers have previously written to the UK Government raising the challenges the approach to asylum is creating for local authorities, citing specific issues affecting Glasgow City Council. I hope that you will take the opportunity to meet with us and work with us on these issues and other measures to tackle the cost of living and take people out of poverty as you look to your first Budget.

Providing adequate investment to deliver successful services for people is vital to ensuring communities have what they need to thrive. However, Scotland continues to face a challenging fiscal settlement, compounded by the ongoing impact of the increase in employer National Insurance contributions, where the additional funding provided by HM Treasury has fallen significantly short of the costs faced by Scotland's public services. Against that backdrop, both resource and capital block grant funding are projected to decline in real terms over the coming years, placing further pressure on the Scottish Government. I would welcome confirmation that the Prime Minister's sentiments on the importance of place are matched in reality with increased investment for both resource and capital in our public services and infrastructure in order to sustain services, build strong communities, and support sustainable economic growth.

The offshore energy sector is a linchpin of Scotland's economic potential. That is why I would support you taking early action to replace the Energy Profits Levy with a fair system that protects jobs, energy security and investment in our energy sector.

Equally, our emergent offshore wind sector requires guarantees on grid connections in order to fulfil its promise. The decisions required to address these issues are in the hands of the UK Government, and for the sake of delivering the energy transition, growing Scotland's economy, and realising a return for public spending, I would hope you will lend your support to delivering this.

As we discussed at our meeting, there are significant opportunities for both our governments to work together to remove barriers to growth and unlock economic potential across Scotland and the wider UK.

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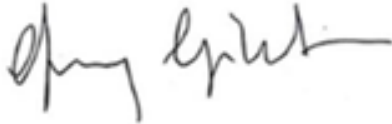
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There are also a range of other matters that I would like to discuss with you, including further devolution of powers, and the repeal of the UK Internal Market Act, to name but a few. I therefore look forward to a further meeting being arranged at the earliest mutually convenient opportunity.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Yours sincerely,



JENNY GILRUTH

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