



5 July 2018

The Convener  
Equalities and Human Rights Committee  
The Scottish Parliament

by email: [Equalities.humanrights@parliament.scot](mailto:Equalities.humanrights@parliament.scot)

CC: Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities

Dear Convener,

Welcome to your new role as Convener of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. I am writing to you in my capacity of COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing in response to a letter from your predecessor seeking more information following the evidence I gave to the Committee in April 2018.

COSLA has a commitment to promoting human rights, and local government in Scotland play a crucial role in protecting and promoting human rights. In January 2014 COSLA Leaders agreed that COSLA and member authorities should support the ethos of the Scottish National Action Plan on Human Rights and engage in the process to take it forward. We were heavily involved in the development and the first four-year implementation period of the plan, particularly the Better Culture strand which aims to build a human rights culture within organisations. We hope to continue our involvement in this work and ensure it continues to support local authorities to develop their approach to human rights. There are also some excellent examples of local authorities implementing a human rights-based approach to their work – perhaps most notably the work that Perth and Kinross Council undertook in partnership with the Scottish Human Rights Commission to pilot embedding a human rights approach into its work, which I described when I attended the Committee.

COSLA's key mechanism for identifying and sharing best practice on human rights across local authorities is the Scottish Councils Equality Network (SCEN) which we support and participate in. The network is made up of officers from all 32 local authorities whose remits include equality and human rights. As well as sharing best practice, SCEN provides a useful forum for local authorities to discuss emergent practice, receive feedback and share ideas on how this work can be improved. In the last year the Network has considered the Perth and Kinross human rights pilot; participatory budgeting as a tool to reinforce a human rights-based approach; how Glasgow City Council has integrated human rights into their impact assessments; and played a role in shaping the guidance on the Fairer Scotland duty.

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However, we recognise that local government (like the rest of Scotland's public sector) is on a journey towards incorporating a more human rights focused approach into day to day work and requires support to achieve this. Input from other bodies such as EHRIC, SHRC and Scottish Government is invaluable in this process, and it is important that these organisations play a supportive role in encouraging local authorities (and the rest of the public sector) to develop their expertise on human rights and how it can be applied to improve the way that they serve their communities. One key improvement in this respect would be a more streamlined approach to the reporting requirements of different legislation related to human rights, equality and inequalities which could make best use of scarce resources, avoid duplication and enhance conformity. The review of the Public Sector Equality Duty currently being taken forward by Scottish Government is an opportunity to achieve this. Perhaps the EHRiC could play a role in reviewing the various reporting requirements currently placed upon public bodies with a view to achieving a better approach that supports a rights-based approach to the development and delivery of the services that our communities most need and value? I would be happy to discuss this further with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elena Whitham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Cllr Elena Whitham**  
**COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson**

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