Dear Councillor Evison

Councillors' Code of Conduct

At its meeting on 6 February, the Committee took evidence from Bill Thomson, Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, mainly in relation to his role investigating breaches of the Councillor's Code. Mr Thomson told us that there is an obligation under the Code for councils to support councillors and that councils did make training available, especially for new councillors, although there were differences of approach. He said it was his observation that individuals receiving the most severe sanction for breach of the Code tended to be those who had not taken any training.

Mr Thomson went on to note that his own role precluded him from giving advice to councillors but that the Standards Commission organised training on the Code, usually on a regional basis. He also said that the Commission arranged regular sessions with councils' monitoring officers, whom he described as “the key people” in providing relevant advice to councillors.

In its discussion after the evidence session, the Committee agreed that I should write to you to seek more information as to the role of councils in providing advice and training on the Councillor’s Code.

The Committee would be very grateful to receive a response. It would be helpful if this could set out (a) your view on COSLA’s role, if any, in promoting the Code and ensuring that councillors receive training, (b) any information you hold on how individual councils promote the Code and provide training, and (c) any general views COSLA may hold on the consistency and effectiveness of training and advice on the Code provided by councils across Scotland.
Without detracting from the generality of this request, I should add that Committee Members expressed an interest in seeking more information on how councils encourage elected members to adhere to the Code’s requirements on registering and declaring interests, noting that, year on year, it is these requirements that tend to lead to the greatest number of breaches.

Yours sincerely

James Dornan MSP
Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee

CC: Sally Loudon, Chief Executive, COSLA