
Report To:	Inverclyde Council	Date:	7 April 2016
Report By:	Head of Legal & Property Services	Report No:	SL/SC/LP/049/16
Contact Officer:	Sharon Lang	Contact No:	01475 712112
Subject:	'Choose Local' - CoSLA's Manifesto for a Stronger Scottish Democracy		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of a request from CoSLA that it endorse the attached manifesto, 'Choose Local' (**Appendix 1**).

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The manifesto achieved cross-party support at CoSLA and was agreed unanimously at the Convention meeting on 11 March 2016.
- 2.2 The CoSLA manifesto seeks to provide a framework for specific local government focused campaigns in relation to key areas of local service delivery. The manifesto focuses and builds on the key elements of the CoSLA Convention's Strategic Work Plan and its unanimous endorsement of the Commission on Local Democracy's Final Report in August 2014.
- 2.3 The manifesto is intended to fulfil two roles: firstly, it is designed to be a statement of the aspirations at a national level of local government; and secondly, it seeks to defend local government's position in the course of the forthcoming election campaign and beyond so that there may be a principled case for strong local democracy for the future.
- 2.4 CoSLA has requested that the Council consider and endorse the manifesto.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That the Council considers 'Choose Local', CoSLA's manifesto for a Stronger Scottish Democracy and decides whether it wishes to endorse its terms.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The manifesto achieved cross-party support at CoSLA and was agreed unanimously at the Convention meeting on 11 March 2016. The manifesto has the objective of strengthening local democracy and empowering communities and to that extent, it focuses and builds upon the key elements of the CoSLA Convention's Strategic Work Plan and its unanimous endorsement of the Commission on Local Democracy's Final Report in August 2014.
- 4.2 The manifesto is intended to fulfil two roles: firstly, it is designed to be a statement of the aspirations at a national level of local government; and secondly, it seeks to defend local government's position in the course of the forthcoming election campaign and beyond so that there may be a principled case for strong local democracy for the future.
- 4.3 The CoSLA approach to its manifesto has been to set out 5 key pledges for the first 100 days of the next Scottish Parliament and the purpose of this is to develop a focus on the early life of the next parliamentary period around which further reform can be built.
- 4.4 The overarching objective of the manifesto is to involve MSPs across the political spectrum in the development of a direction of public service reform that matches the unanimous CoSLA Convention proposals.
- 4.5 The manifesto will be supplemented by CoSLA with a series of campaigns focused on specific issues and challenges that are highlighted through the work of the CoSLA specific policy teams and its Executive Groups. It is CoSLA's intention that the manifesto will provide a strong vision for local government and CoSLA seeks the support of individual Councils and elected members in driving these aspirations forward.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annually Recurring Costs/(Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Legal

- 5.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

- 5.3 There are no human resources implications arising from this report

Equalities

- 5.4 There are no equalities implications arising from this report

Repopulation

- 5.5 There are no repopulation implications arising from this report

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

6.1 This report has been endorsed by the CMT.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

#CHOOSELOCAL

COSLA's Manifesto for a Stronger Scottish Democracy





Scotland needs local solutions...

Join the movement to put local democracy at the heart of Scotland's future.

On May 5, Scotland goes to the polls. Yet it is sometimes easy to forget that real democracy is about more than just 129 MSPs in Holyrood. With budgets, Europe, and constitutional debates across the headlines, we shouldn't forget that democratic government in Scotland exists at both national and local levels, and that both must flourish if they are to improve lives across the communities that they serve.

That's important, because when you speak to people, their story is not about the workings of Holyrood or Westminster. It is about the local services that communities need, and about having a real say about what matters to them. After all, it is at the local level, in the places where people live, that local government services make a difference every day.

It should therefore be no surprise that there is now a powerful new movement taking hold across the country focused on what it would take to put communities in control.

COSLA - the voice of local government in Scotland - has long been a driving force for change. Not long ago we backed the radical vision put forward by the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy to empower local communities to decide on their priorities, their services, and their spending. We are determined to deliver change, no matter how

difficult the financial pressure gets and no matter what obstacles get in the way. We simply cannot afford to do anything else

People have been flocking to the debate, but meaningful reform is yet to happen. A local revolution is within the grasp of the next Scottish Parliament, but simply won't be possible without commitment from across the political spectrum and across all spheres of government. That's why it is time to shift the focus from talk to action.

Together, we can unlock the benefits of new forms of democracy, and deliver the opportunities for positive change locally. And we can give local government an unambiguous place in the governance of Scotland.

Most of all, the evidence tells us that the challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces need local solutions. That's why we are asking any parliamentarian committed to better and more equal outcomes to sign up to our five pledges. Together, we can start to put local democracy on the map in just 100 days.

Strengthening local democracy means strengthening Scotland's communities, and nothing matters more than that.

Let's build from the bottom up, not redesign from the top down

Up and down the country, people are recognising that the top down approach has had its time. Reform should start by focusing on building local democratic choice says COSLA President Councillor David O'Neill.



All of us in Scotland share many common goals. We want the places where we live to be safe and healthy, vibrant and sustainable, and offer good, decently rewarded jobs. We want older people everywhere to enjoy a fulfilling old age; the young to reach their full potential; the vulnerable to be protected.

The case for much stronger local democracy is founded on the simple premise that it is fundamentally better for decisions about these goals to be made by those that are most affected by them. Scotland is a diverse country: what works in our cities will not suit remote rural communities, just as the priorities in our towns will not be the same as those on our islands.

Scotland's local services have had real success in addressing Scotland's most significant problems, providing high quality education, health and social care, justice, employment and protecting the environment. Even at a time of reducing resources, the latest benchmarking information shows that councils have continued to protect communities while demonstrating some impressive improvements. But with local government budgets under serious pressure, and demand for public services rising fast, hugely difficult choices are required about what to do more of, less of, or differently – and about the resources to pay for these choices. That's

why it is time to harness the power of a more locally democratic way of doing things, and by doing so, overhaul participation in decision making across the country.

Taking power to the centre has just not worked

Our focus is not on any particular governments, but on tackling a 50 year trend in how we 'do' democracy here in Scotland. We have tried taking power to the centre and it has just not delivered.

Quite simply, Scotland will not become a fairer, healthier and wealthier place from the top down. Despite all of the best efforts of the public sector, inequalities in Scotland are growing. Poor outcomes for a small proportion of the population drive very large amounts of public spending and if we don't do something soon, inequalities in Scotland could start to overtake some third world countries. No-one in Scotland set out to create these outcomes, but they are unacceptable in a modern democracy, and they have to change.

Scotland is out of step internationally

Yet in Europe and around the world, communities have been enjoying the benefits

of strong local democracy for generations. Councils across almost all European countries cover smaller populations, and they have better constitutional protection and considerably less reliance on national funding. It's also no coincidence that our European neighbours are often more successful at improving outcomes.

We must have the determination to replicate this kind of thinking in Scotland too. Thankfully, a new tide of local democratic ambition is beginning to wash the outdated centralising mind-set away. Few people now seriously believe that taking power away from locally elected people and placing it in the hands of remote or unaccountable bureaucracies can ever improve lives. But while the local debate is gathering pace, real action is now needed if we are to turn the current situation around.

Local democracy is the key to turning around participation for the long term

In practical terms alone, the case for local democracy is therefore clear.

But our argument is that for principled reasons too, Scotland needs stronger local democracy like never before.

Giving people a real say over what matters to them is the key to addressing electoral participation and revitalising the whole democratic process. Many people are understandably losing interest in a local democracy over which they feel little influence, where decisions are taken far away from where they live, and where it is hard to see the link between what they pay and what happens.

Instead, there is a simple idea up for grabs - that democratic power should be built from communities up, not drip down from above.

That does not mean that a strong place for local government calls into question the wholly legitimate role of national government to set national priorities, or our obligation in local government to use local policy and service delivery to deliver benefits for Scotland.

Nor does it mean that the structures and practices of an old fashioned type of democracy can be allowed to characterise Scotland's future. Any empowerment of local democratic decision making must depend on actively empowering citizens and communities too. Simply empowering local services will not in its own right pass our test of a strong democracy; these have to be planned and delivered in ways that build in democratic participation, and empower local people to decide about their place and their future.

Local choices over taxation and spending

However, on its own, this is not enough to create real local choice and accountability. Just 12% of local expenditure is currently raised through local taxation. This seriously limits the tax and spend choices available to communities, and with no real choice available to them, it also holds back their participation. We believe this balance of funding needs to be addressed to truly empower local government both democratically and financially.

There is a huge debate to be had about the future of local government finance. We've developed a clear and principled blueprint



around which effective reform can take place.

We are not promoting more, or less, taxation and spending: we simply want the decisions about these issues to be made locally. Communities should decide on the services they want and how to pay for these - it is completely inconsistent with a strong democracy for this to be determined or enforced nationally.

Local by Default: a prize worth fighting for

If we want to truly empower local choice and control then we need to make democracy local by default. A simple, transparent approach to local services is needed and, in line with the principles of subsidiarity, any reform must start with a presumption that all local services are locally democratic.

Of course, some politicians may feel their mandate is to control. Some may fear delivering services differently across the country, or moving away from a one size fits all approach. Some might therefore want to trade away real change for the usual wrangling over which institutions to empower, or by taking a top down view about which powers they are prepared to loosen grip of.

Quite simply, this will not deliver the change that Scotland needs. Strong democracy means putting local people in charge of their own lives, and freeing national government to focus on outcomes for the whole of Scotland, and the rights that all communities should enjoy.

It is a prize worth fighting for. A democracy where local communities have more say; where different needs are met with different solutions; and where new ideas can flourish will empower local councils to use their democratic mandate to really influence the issues that matter locally. Achieve that and we can transform participation in our democracy and address the huge social and financial costs of persistent inequality in this country. Those costs affect every community, and so closing the gap will benefit everyone.



This local, outcomes based approach makes sense, and the evidence from around the world shows that it works.

Across the country, Scotland's historically local mind-set is already trying to break free.

Now it is time to make it happen.

#SP16 - 5 PLEDGES TO PUT LOCAL DEMOCRACY ON THE MAP

Politicians across the spectrum can start to make a real difference in the first 100 days of the next Parliament. Here's how.

There's a growing hunger in Scotland for a more local future. Change is needed, but we are urging parliamentarians not to opt for a clumsy restructuring of services. Redesigning from the top down may feel like taking action, but it will not enable communities to reach their full potential. We want an alternative, based on rebuilding democracy from communities up, and on using all the levers of reform rather than just ones that might sound good.

That will take time, but real progress can be made right now. That's why we're inviting every politician to work with us to deliver on 5 key pledges within the first 100 days of their election. Together, we can help start an unstoppable movement for change that can transform Scotland for the better.



Make Scotland's public services local by default

... through an immediate review to localise and simplify how all public services are governed and accountable to communities.

Any reform of the public sector needs to bring democratic power closer to people. After all, services that are driven by local priorities are best able to improve outcomes, use resources effectively, and empower those around them.

What happens today will not deliver the kind of approach required in future. That's why it is time to look again at governance right across the public sector to ensure that local people and their representatives, not bureaucracies, are accountable for the decisions that affect where they live.

Approaching democracy that way round will really transform Scotland. It could amount to the biggest decentralisation of power ever undertaken. By beginning the process now, we can ensure that all services that can be locally planned and delivered are democratically accountable to local people.



Redraw the partnership between local and national government

... beginning with a summit that delivers a new framework for local and national government.

17 years after the Scottish Parliament was established, devolution within Scotland remains unfinished business. Yet around the world, local choices are not something to be debated; they are simply part of the landscape.

Local variation is the solution, not the blockage, to better and more cost effective public services. That does not mean leaving local areas to do whatever they want. National government has a clear mandate to establish priorities for the nation and protect our rights as citizens. But these should be delivered in ways that respond to local diversity, and which uphold local democratic priorities and preferences.

It is the people of Scotland that want government at two levels, who elect representatives to each, and who should determine the services that each provide. That's why we need to re-energise the relationship between local and national government in Scotland, and put it on a formal footing.



Give communities financial choices

... starting by putting local control at the heart of local taxation.

Strong local democracy is a false promise without local fiscal autonomy, and reform is urgently needed. We now have a fiscal framework between the UK and Scottish Governments, and there's no reason why one cannot be created between local and national government too.

50 years ago, Scotland's councils raised over 50% of their expenditure through local taxation. Today that has fallen to 12% here, but it is far higher elsewhere in Europe. The council tax freeze has been in place for 9 years, and since 1990 non-domestic rates have been centrally controlled.

As an immediate step, a new approach to local taxation will be delivered during the next parliament. But as a country we can be ambitious and put local democratic choices back into local government finance. Rather than setting restrictions from the centre, real local financial powers would allow communities to decide their priorities and how to pay for these. Specifically we are calling for:

- Freedom to spend in ways that reflect local choice and accountability;
- An end to central direction in the setting and raising of local taxes;
- The power to introduce local discretionary taxes, subject to the assent of the local electorate.

A new, locally empowering approach to local government finance would allow local people to see what they pay for and hold their representatives to account. And because the local electorate, not national politicians, would be in control, it would help end the cyclical blame game between councils and Ministers for what happens locally.



Open up Scottish democracy

... by joining COSLA in establishing a constitutional convention to design a new approach to accountability.

Our interest in better local democracy is not an end in itself. It is because empowering citizens and turning around participation are the best ways to improve wellbeing and reduce inequalities for the whole of Scotland. For that to happen, local participation and elected representation both need to prosper interdependently, rather than be seen as different standards to compete with one another. This is as true of local government as it is of national government.

Change therefore has to happen at all levels of our political system. Significant investment and energy is going to be needed to build the capacity and confidence of communities to participate effectively, particularly amongst those that are furthest from decisions at the moment. That process needs to start now. By establishing a convention in the early life of the parliament- bringing together local and national government, the third sector, public services and communities – we can set a course to build the habits of democracy and foster active citizenship for the long term.

Building strong participation does not diminish the role of representative democracy. Elected representatives are fundamental to an effective democracy and will be all the more so in a context where more decisions and powers are held locally in the future. Our ambition is that as a nation we come to think of democracy not as separate or competing bodies of ‘participation’ and ‘representation’, but more simply a positive culture of collaboration in which everyone with a stake in the improvement of local outcomes is empowered to fulfil their part.



Join up thinking on reform

... by focusing the debate on local outcomes not sound bites.

People want better outcomes from the public sector in Scotland. Yet some political thinking still focuses on inputs such as police or teacher numbers, or policies that can prescribe how budgets are used regardless of their local relevance. This is wasteful and does little to prevent problems from emerging in the first place.

The move to genuine outcomes has started, but it has to become the predominant measure by which services are judged. Further and faster progress is now needed. Populist sounding but unhelpful arguments about inputs might appeal to some, but we are asking all parliamentarians to embrace a more progressive debate.

Of course, better outcomes are not just determined by local government, but by the way all public services do business. We therefore also need to prevent a proliferation of competing agendas from diverting attention and resources away from that task. That means freeing up all local partners to listen to communities and focus on what makes the difference to them, not one size fits all solutions or complex governance arrangements.

It's time to recognise the difference that local accountability makes. If you agree, join us in building a stronger democracy.

A new approach to localism could be on the horizon. Expectations are high, because Scotland needs strong local services as never before.

There's already lots of talk about who is best placed to make tough decisions and to get the best from finite resources. We believe the solution is about bringing government closer to people, and making representative and participatory democracy complementary rather than competitive drivers for change.

The debate has come a long way, and around the country and across the political spectrum, the power of a more local approach is becoming clear. With the case for change now inarguable, it's time to make it happen.

We know that success won't happen overnight, but the first 100 days of the next Scottish Parliament can set the scene for real success.

With so much at stake, we also know that it can be easy to lose sight of a principled approach in the hunt for proposals that are quick to implement, easily understood, and which grab headlines. Our aspiration is about much more than that. Doing the right things can start to close the inequalities gap, and improve outcomes for everyone in Scotland. But the wrong approach will cause this gap to grow and lead to services that are ineffective and unaffordable.

That's why we have to guard against centralism and instead deliver real accountability into the hands of local people. Strong local democracy doesn't mean simply passing down a few powers from above, or taking shortcuts and sidestepping local democratic representation. Yet neither does it mean shutting out new forms of participation and empowerment, or being disconnected from national priorities.



Instead we must keep our eye on the prize — better outcomes for local people. By working together, we can create the conditions to reignite local empowerment and participation, and give people back a real local voice. Easy sounding fixes may therefore look appealing, but tinkering around the edges has already led to uneven thinking about democracy and is likely to do little or nothing to fundamentally improve it in the future.

Instead, we're asking anyone with an interest in improving outcomes in Scotland to commit to five key pledges. They are grounded in the real life issues that councils and their communities are facing, and we will rally around them in the negotiations that COSLA and councils engage in every day.

Take these bold steps forward, and we can start to transform our democracy, and improve outcomes for everyone in Scotland. What's more, we can help make sure that a modern local government is part of the governance of a modern Scotland.

That is an exciting challenge, and the real winners will be our communities. We are determined to succeed, and we want to work with anyone who is similarly interested in improving lives in Scotland.

We look forward to the debate that lies ahead; because one thing is for sure - together we have a duty to get this right.

