



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Local Government and Regeneration Committee

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Convener

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6 February 2014

Dear David

Re: Inquiry into the Flexibility and Autonomy of Local Government

At its meeting yesterday the Local Government and Regeneration Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the flexibility and autonomy of local government in Scotland. The Committee plans to launch a public call for written evidence on this inquiry this coming Monday 10 February. For your information, I attach the remit for the inquiry in Annexe A to the letter, and an embargoed copy of the call for evidence in Annexe B.

I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you in advance of this launch, to inform you of this inquiry and set out the reasons for the Committee's decision.

In 2012 the Committee agreed in principle to undertake an inquiry on the position of local government in Scotland, as part of its longer term work programme. At the time, the Committee agreed to consider a more detailed remit for such an inquiry in late 2013 or early 2014. Owing to the pressure of parliamentary and inquiry work, this has been the first opportunity the Committee has had to agree a suitable remit and timeframe for this inquiry.

In the intervening period, the Scottish Government has published its white paper, *Scotland's Future*, and COSLA has established the *Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy*. Both of these developments have contributed greatly to the ongoing public discussion on how Scotland should move forward as we approach the independence referendum in September.

I feel it important to set out the Committee's view that we see our inquiry as being complimentary to the work the Commission is currently undertaking. We have noted with interest the oral evidence the Commission has been taking in recent weeks and the focus on examining the place of democratic structures at the most local level in Scotland. Of course, the role of local government is central to this consideration, and I await the findings of the Commission with great interest. I have no doubt they will make a very valuable contribution to the ongoing public debate.

I am also confident that the findings of the Commission will add greatly to the Committee's consideration of the forthcoming Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. I am sure you will agree this piece of legislation has the potential to become a cornerstone for empowering local communities across Scotland. This will, in my view, be central to the efforts to strengthen local democracy.

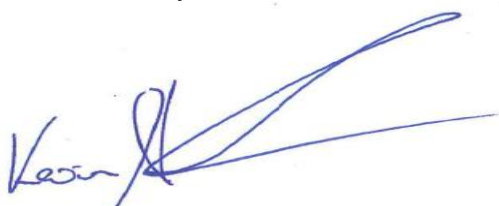
The Committee was invited to make a written a submission to the Commission during its call for evidence in late 2013. However, given the fact the Committee has a long standing commitment to undertake an inquiry on a similar topic, we felt it prudent to refrain. Instead we are seeking to add value to the debate by undertaking the inquiry we will launch on 10 February. It is our intention to publish our findings and recommendations by the end of June, thereby allowing us to take on board the findings of the Commission in the recommendations we make to the Parliament and the Scottish Government.

While we would welcome a written submission from COSLA as part of our inquiry, I appreciate it may be more productive for the Commission to conclude its current work stream and then bring its findings to our attention. I note the Commission's intention to report the main messages emerging from its work at the COSLA/IS Annual Conference in mid-March.

We would also welcome an opportunity for Members of the Commission to give oral evidence to the Committee, as part of our inquiry, in early May 2014.

In the meantime, if COSLA requires any further information, please feel free to contact the Clerk to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener
Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Annexe A: Inquiry Remit

Inquiry into the Flexibility and Autonomy of Local Government

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee has launched an inquiry to examine the levels of flexibility and autonomy available to local government. The aim of the inquiry is to learn lessons, and inform the ongoing debate on whether there is a need to strengthen and enhance local democratic structures in Scotland. The inquiry will—

- Contrast the position of local government with the constitutional and legal framework in neighbouring EU jurisdictions;
- Examine the level of public engagement and interaction with local government, including turnout at local elections;
- Consider the legal and constitutional funding mechanisms available to local government;
- Consider how remote, peripheral or island communities are accommodated within the local government structures; and
- Consider the level of legal flexibility, and autonomy from central government, which local government enjoys.

Annexe B: Draft Call for Public Evidence



Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Public call for Written Evidence

Inquiry into the Flexibility and Autonomy of Local Government

The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee has today, Monday 10 February 2014, launched a call for written evidence as part of its inquiry into the flexibility available to Local Government in Scotland

Organisations and individuals are invited to submit written evidence to the Committee setting out their views.

Committee's Call for evidence

The Committee invites all interested parties to submit written evidence on the inquiry. It would be helpful if written submissions could address the following questions—

1. Does any action require to be taken to improve the level of public engagement and interaction with local government, if so please suggest what action might be beneficial?
2. Views on the current legal and funding positions of local government.
3. Views on the way that remote, peripheral and island communities are accommodated within the local government structure.
4. Views on the level of legal flexibility and autonomy from central government that local government enjoys.

How to submit your evidence

The closing date for receipt of submissions is **6pm on Friday 28 March 2014**. Submissions should be limited to no more than eight pages of A4. Responses should be sent, **wherever possible, electronically** and in MS Word format to the following email address: lgr.committee@scottish.parliament.uk

Before submitting your evidence please read the Parliament's policy on treatment of written evidence by subject and mandatory committees (see below).

Responses can also be sent by post to:

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