



Bruce Crawford MSP
Convener
Devolution (Further Powers) Committee
By email

8 January 2015

Dear Bruce

**STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH THE WORK OF THE DEVOLUTION
(FURTHER POWERS) COMMITTEE**

I am writing to you regarding the work that the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee is undertaking to consider key issues associated with Scotland's constitutional future and the implementation of the Smith Commission's proposals.

I know that the Committee has already begun to consider what this exciting new chapter in Scotland's democratic evolution could mean. At this early stage I would be delighted to discuss how to locate the debate about new powers locally, so that as a country we can look back and be able to say that Scotland's future has been truly built around the communities that live there.

It is already clear that a much more local approach could really change things in Scotland. All of the evidence tells us that rethinking the top down way of working that has characterised our system of government over the last 50 years is an opportunity to tackle the huge social and financial costs of inequality in this country, and turn around disillusionment with the democratic process.

It is perhaps for that reason that as Scotland looks to the future, there now seems to be general agreement that simply repositioning power nationally will not address the different challenges and opportunities that communities face, or deliver the kind of participation that Referendum has shown is possible. Indeed, it was immensely encouraging to see the job of strengthening local democracy feature across so many of the submissions made to the Smith Commission, not least of all those made by each of the political parties themselves.

Of course, those arguments were also strongly endorsed by the Smith Commission. As you will know, in his Foreword to the report Lord Smith states that:

"There is a strong desire to see the principle of devolution extended further, with the

transfer of powers from Holyrood to local communities. This is an issue that will require significant further thought and discussion and I welcome the enthusiasm of all parties for greater empowerment of our communities. The Scottish Government should work with the Parliament, civic Scotland and local authorities to set out ways in which local areas can benefit from the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

While the details will take time, I know that the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee will already be considering its role in fulfilling that potential.

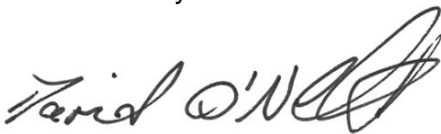
At least two components of work seem necessary. Firstly, given that the majority of the Smith Commission recommendations will be delivered locally, and that it is at the local level that communities will experience their impact, I believe that local circumstances and opportunities need to be fully accommodated within the detailed design and implementation of any proposals that follow. I would be delighted to share the expertise and experience that COSLA and councils can provide in order to support the Committee in this regard.

Secondly, I believe that there has never been a better time to ensure that we collectively use this period of change to rethink how we 'do' democracy in Scotland and to put communities in charge of their spending, their services and how they are governed. There are many opportunities to begin that change. For example, the Committee has already begun to consider how permanency of the Scottish Parliament can be achieved. In my view there is an equally important question to resolve regarding how to guarantee, for the first time, every communities' right to local self-government. Indeed, in a strong democracy and given the clear recommendations made by the Smith Commission about extending devolution beyond Holyrood, I know that the Committee will keen to ensure that subsidiarity is at the heart of its thinking over the coming period.

While a huge amount of hard work therefore lies ahead, I believe that if we are prepared to take bold steps forward then we can start to transform our democracy, turn around participation, and address the huge social and financial costs of persistent inequality.

I know that you are motivated by those objectives too, and I look forward to continuing the discussion with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David O'Neill', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cllr David O'Neill
President of COSLA