



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Katy Clark MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland Region

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John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Our Reference: CPS-JR

A Strategy for Council Pay and Services

Dear John,

I am writing regarding the ongoing dispute around local government pay between trade unions, COSLA and the Scottish Government.

As you will know, trade unions have secured mandates for strike action in waste and recycling, as well as early years, in local authorities across Scotland. This is an urgent situation which could see tens of thousands of local government workers being driven into in-work poverty at a time of record inflation.

My understanding is COSLA this week increased its offer from 2% to 3.5%. This is woefully insufficient given the current inflation rate is 9.4% at time of writing and anticipated to rise into double figures in the new year. Whilst I understand the Scottish Government has said it has provided £140 million for pay rises, this is still nowhere near enough. Indeed, the current offer in Scotland is the lowest offer to public sector workers in the UK, with even the UK Government delivering a 10.5% rise to the lowest paid in local authorities.

You have previously argued this is due to budget cuts from the UK government, but the Scottish Government has repeatedly failed to fund local authorities sufficiently. Despite the Scottish Government's budget increasing by 3.1% between 2014 and 2021, for example, council budgets were cut by 2.4% over the same period. The latest core revenue budget for councils announced earlier this year represented a further 1.5% real terms cut.

The fact is funding can be found with political will, as was the case with the 'thank you' payment to frontline workers. The Scottish Government must not simply pass the buck to COSLA whilst simultaneously blaming the UK Government when the powers available to Holyrood far outweigh those of Scottish councils. It is also unacceptable to threaten to cut services and the workforce to meet pay demands, as you suggested in this year's Spending Review.

Given the Tory leadership candidates' farcical economic pledges, it is clear the Scottish Government must use its own powers to confront the local government crisis, whether it be



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through existing redistributive taxation or by exploring the viability of land value taxation, for example.

Longstanding cuts to local government and the failure to improve public sector pay are a source of shame. There is no route to building back better from this pandemic that does not include ensuring a fair deal for all workers. I would strongly urge you to commit further funding to secure a fair pay rise for council workers and come forward with a renewed strategy for the financing of local services.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Katy Clark MSP
West Scotland Region