



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Shona Robison MSP,  
Cabinet Secretary for  
Social Justice, Housing  
and Local Government

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

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Dear Shona,

Thank you for giving evidence on the Budget for 2023-24 at our meeting on 17 January. Given the importance of the New Deal for Local Government and its accompanying Fiscal Framework, the Committee recognises that it is more important to get it right than to meet an arbitrary deadline, but we are keen that this work progresses as a matter of urgency. We therefore welcome your desire to “turbocharge the focus on the new deal” and your recognition that “if a deal is going to stand the test of time, even if it takes a few more months to get it right, that is probably the right call.”<sup>1</sup>

As you know, the Committee has taken evidence on the New Deal from a range of stakeholders in recent months and has heard calls for multi-year settlements to provide greater financial certainty, whilst also allowing greater flexibility to respond to local priorities. We would welcome confirmation of whether the Scottish Government is considering ways in which local decision making could be enhanced under the New Deal. We note the commitment to a Visitor Levy Bill in the programme for government and look forward to considering that legislation in due course, but we also heard from the Chair of SOLACE that a “general competence” under which local authorities could consider new revenue-generating proposals in line with local circumstances would be welcome.<sup>2</sup> We would welcome your views on the merits of such a competence and confirmation of whether this is expected to form part of discussions on the New Deal.

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<sup>1</sup> [Official Report \(parliament.scot\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Official Report \(parliament.scot\)](#)

Like you, the Committee is also keen that greater clarity is brought to the local government funding settlement so we can move on from what has become an annual disagreement on figures between COSLA and the Scottish Government, for example on whether funding is “new” or comes from previously announced initiatives or whether or not it is “ring-fenced”. In our view, it would greatly assist public understanding if the New Deal was to include an agreed approach to the presentation of such funding to help reduce such misunderstanding.

In respect of the wider Local Governance Review, we note your response on 9 February to question S6O-01893 in which you confirmed that the Scottish Government “remains committed to concluding the local governance review within this session of Parliament and will continue to work on it in close partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.”<sup>3</sup>

We welcome your reiteration of this commitment but are mindful that the Review commenced in 2017 with little sign of progress to date. Whilst we recognise that circumstances beyond the Scottish Government’s control, most notably the Covid-19 pandemic, contributed to understandable delays with this work, we urge the Scottish Government and its partners to progress the Review as a matter of urgency.

Finally, we note previous commitments to “bring forward a Local Democracy Bill, devolving more decisions and resources to more local spheres of democratic governance, following the conclusion of the Local Governance Review which will continue the joint working between Scottish Government, COSLA and communities.”<sup>4</sup> Given your commitment to concluding the Review of Local Governance before the end of the current parliamentary session, we would welcome confirmation that it remains your intention to also bring forward a Local Democracy Bill once the findings of the Review have been published.

I would be grateful if you would continue to update the Committee on progress in respect of all three strands of this important work.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Ariane Burgess  
Convener, Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

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<sup>3</sup> [Official Report \(parliament.scot\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 \(www.gov.scot\)](#)