

# Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

## 17th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6)

Tuesday 13 June 2023

### Reform Scotland: Devolving Scotland

#### Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information for the Committee's evidence session with Alison Payne, Research Director of Reform Scotland.

#### Purpose

2. The intention is that this session will allow the Committee to further explore issues of relevance to the ongoing [Review of Local Governance](#) which is intended to strengthen local decision-making and consider how powers and resources should be shared between national and local government, and with Scotland's communities.

3. The Committee has previously held several evidence sessions to inform this work, hearing from representatives of local government, COSLA, SOLACE and community groups.

4. Most recently, the Committee held a joint event with Scotland's Futures Forum on the future relationship between local and central government in Scotland which brought together MSPs and a range of stakeholders from central and local government, academia, and the public, private and third sectors. The report of the event can be accessed via the following link: [Central and Local Government: Building for the Future - Event Report \(scotlandfutureforum.org\)](#)

5. During this session, the Committee will have the opportunity to explore issues relating to Reform Scotland's recently launched "Devolving Scotland" platform. This is described on Reform Scotland's website in the following terms—

"To mark 30 years since publication of '*Shaping the Future: The New Councils*', the white paper which led to the creation of the 32 local authorities we have today, our 'Devolving Scotland' forum will be a platform for debate and discussion about specific measures individuals believe can help regenerate local government and set out a new vision for a decentralised Scotland."

6. Further information on the initiative can be found in a briefing note from Reform Scotland is attached as an annexe. This briefing highlights some of the recommendations made by Scottish Parliament Local Government

committees in previous sessions along with cross-party support for greater decentralisation in Scotland and for local government renewal but notes that there has been limited reform since the creation of the Scottish Parliament.

7. The briefing note goes on to state that—

“Reform Scotland believes that the country needs to have a debate focused on the specific measures that can regenerate local government, and to set out a new vision for a decentralised Scotland.”

8. Topics previously highlighted by Reform Scotland include—

- Directly elected mayors
- Full devolution of council tax, including the ability to replace it
- Full devolution of business rates
- Councillors’ pay and conditions”

9. To date, three articles have been published on the platform as follows—

- [A conversation to decentralise Scotland – Lord Jack McConnell](#)
- [Returning to the path we did not take – Cllr Alison Evison \(former President of COSLA\)](#)
- [Understand the problems. Understand their causes. Work to find solutions – Johann Lamont](#)

## Background

10. Reform Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland which describes itself as “a non-partisan public policy institute which works to promote increased economic prosperity, more effective public services and expanded opportunities for all Scots.”

11. Reform Scotland is independent of political parties and other organisations. It is funded by donations from private individuals, charitable trusts and corporate organisations. Its Director and Research Director work closely with the Advisory Board, chaired by Lord McConnell, which meets regularly to review the research and policy programme.

12. According to its website, Reform Scotland’s policies cover the following broad themes—

- Increasing prosperity;
- A positive climate for entrepreneurs and innovators;
- Reform and modernisation of public services;
- Widening opportunity for all;
- Compassion for those who slip through the cracks;
- Greater courage and appetite for risk among policymakers.

**Conclusion**

13. The Committee is invited to consider the above information in its evidence session with Reform Scotland.

14. Other related issues which the Committee may wish to discuss include—

- The proposed New Deal for Local Government (including a Fiscal Framework);
- Community Empowerment;
- Community Wealth-Building;
- Any future Local Democracy Bill;
- Deliberative engagement on local government funding sources, including the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates.

**Committee Clerks,  
June 2023**