

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**7 NOVEMBER 2002**

**Report by Chief Executive**

**MEMBERSHIP OF COSLA**

**SUMMARY**

This report fulfils the remit to the Chief Executive to bring forward a report on the benefits to Angus Council of Membership of COSLA and the consequence of any decision to withdraw.

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Angus Council notes the contents of this report and recognises the value of having an organisation which is the representative voice of local government in Scotland.

**2. REMIT TO CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Members will recall that at their meeting on 19 September 2002, in the context of a debate about how COSLA had represented views on the question of electoral reform for Local Government, the Chief Executive was instructed to bring forward a report on the benefits to Angus Council of membership of COSLA and the consequences of any decision to withdraw.

This report fulfils that remit.

**3. BACKGROUND**

COSLA is the representative voice of Scotland's unitary local authorities. Its main objectives are to:

- Develop and maintain effective working relationships with the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Executive, UK Government, European institutions and partner organisations, with a view to promoting the role of councils and ensuring that local government has greater control over its own affairs.
- Support councils in providing leadership for the communities they represent, strengthening local democracy and increasing the public's awareness of and support for local government.
- Support councils in the continuous improvement of service delivery and in providing the best possible value for money.

COSLA's role has been represented diagrammatically as follows:

### COSLA'S ROLE FOR THE FUTURE

#### Local Government

- Local Government finance a core activity
- Act as employers' association on behalf of member councils
- Represent Local Government, influencing policy and promoting Local Government agenda
- Facilitate task group or lead authority model to take forward Policy Agenda

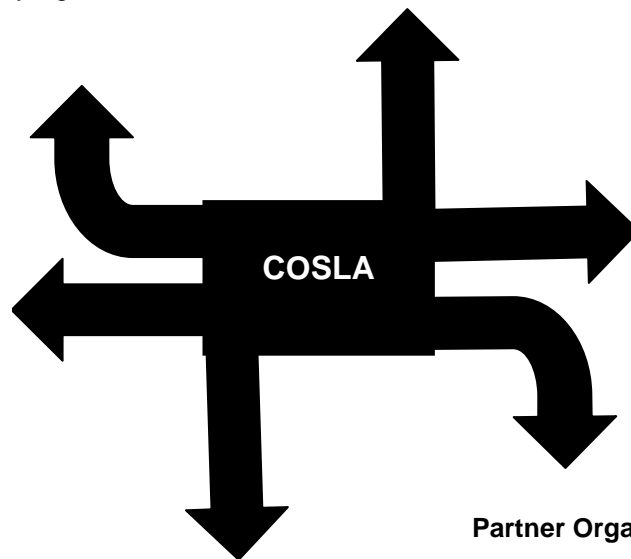
#### Scottish Executive

Engage with the Scottish Executive through

- Influencing policy development
- Contact with Ministers
- Liaison and joint working with civil servants

#### European Institutions

- European affairs
- European Funds
- European impact upon Local Government e.g. employment law, environmental standards etc.



#### Scottish Parliament

- Evidence to committees
- Influencing Policy
- Strategic alliances

#### UK Government

- National Policy Initiatives
- National Public Expenditure
- Regulation & Trade

#### Partner Organisations

- Developing common agendas
- Visits to every Council
- MSPs receptions
- Scottish Six

Some of COSLA's recent achievements are very significant and would not have happened without COSLA's efforts eg:

- abolition of spending guideline arrangements
- written and oral evidence to various Parliamentary Committees
- developed the Best Value agenda with the Scottish Executive
- influenced the Scottish Executive in respect of the legislative proposals to provide a statutory basis for community planning and secure a power of community initiative
- joint policy development with the Scottish Executive and partner organisations re Social Justice, Equalities, Human Rights, the Voluntary Sector and Rural Policy
- written and oral evidence to various Committees of the Scottish Parliament on a range of issues important to Local Government
- acceptance by Scottish Executive that amendments to the present capital control arrangements need to be taken forward

- detailed work on the Housing Bill, the Social Work Bill, the development of best practice on anti-social neighbour strategies, and the Local Government in Scotland Bill

There is no doubt that the Council's membership of COSLA brings many practical benefits to service delivery in Angus. The 2002/03 financial contribution from Angus Council to COSLA is £62,000. It is suggested that this sum is good value for money particularly in the context of the recent fundamental review of COSLA which has led to a slimmed down staffing structure, a reduction in its range of services and a firm focus on the following core activities:

- campaigning for local government (particularly on Finance issues)
- pay negotiations
- influencing legislation
- influencing policy development
- engaging with the Scottish Executive and Parliament
- promotion of good practice and best value
- effective communications

Some concerns have been expressed about whether COSLA as a body is asked properly to represent the views of all of its member councils.

It should be noted that this was an issue which surfaced strongly in the recent review of COSLA and the result was agreement that:

“Whenever a formal decision on an issue takes place within the Convention, the absence of complete unanimity within COSLA on the matter in question should be acknowledged in media releases.”

If Angus Council were to withdraw from COSLA, the main areas in which the Council would be disadvantaged would be:

- Distribution of finance

The Scottish Executive liaises closely with COSLA in the process of grant distribution. Angus Council's Chief Executive and Director of Finance, through their membership of COSLA Committees and their SOLACE and CIPFA roles, have been in a position to have influence on decisions.

- Pay Negotiations

If Angus Council were to withdraw from COSLA, they would be withdrawing from the national pay bargaining body for local government. The prospect of local pay bargaining with the various trades unions is not one which is likely to be attractive to any council as a large-scale employer.

- Policy Formulation

- The Leader of the Administration is Leader of the SNP Group in COSLA. He participates in monthly Leaders' Meetings and frequently attends Ministerial Meetings as a COSLA representative.
- The various Angus Council Conveners are involved in developing policy and strategy via task groups and networks of members and officers.

- Angus Council's Vice-Convenor of Housing is the COSLA Spokesperson on Housing.
- The Chief Executive of Angus Council as Honorary Secretary of SOLACE (Scotland) jointly with the Chief Executive of COSLA compiles the agenda and calls meetings of all Chief Executives with COSLA senior officers.

Angus Council is well rated on the national stage. The Council has made a substantial contribution to Scottish Local Government since 1995 and has certainly benefited a great deal in terms of knowledge/information and finance through its involvement in COSLA.

Withdrawal from COSLA on the face of it would save an annual payment of £62,000 but in reality, Angus Council would be the real loser in terms of both finance and influence. It is essential that Angus Council continues to participate fully in a local government organisation which represents our interests particularly in respect of pay bargaining, financial allocations and influencing Scottish Executive policy.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is provision within the 2002/03 estimates for the annual membership costs of £62,000 associated with COSLA.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

The Directors of Law & Administration and Finance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

#### **6. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this Report

ABW/JW  
29 October 2002

E:SandyW/Reports/Membership of COSLA