

ANGUS COUNCIL
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report by Chief Executive

COSLA REVIEW

SUMMARY

This report advises members of the work of the COSLA Review Group and seeks agreement to the completed questionnaire submitted by the Chief Executive after consultation with the Convener of the Policy and Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee agrees the attached completed questionnaire as Angus Council's response to the COSLA Review Group.

REPORT

Members are aware that there is an ongoing review of the activities of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the light of the withdrawal of 3 Councils from membership and a consequent escalation of financial difficulties. Angus Council and another 28 Councils remain in membership and have paid an interim levy in respect of the current year.

A Review Group has been established to make recommendations on the priorities and future direction of COSLA. The Review Group has sought the views of Councils through the issue of a questionnaire. Since the Review Group has been asked to report to the full COSLA meeting at the end of June, Councils were asked for views by 25 May 2001.

The attached response, which was agreed with the Convener of the Policy and Resources Committee, was submitted to meet that time scale, with an indication that it would receive Committee consideration in due course.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the Committee should be aware that a sum of £62,000 has been budgeted for COSLA

subscription in 2001/02. An interim levy of £54,366 has been paid in the current year and a sum of £6,000 has been reserved in the budget to allow for subscription to Quality Scotland and L.A.C.O.T.S. The subscription to these bodies was formerly met from the COSLA subscription but was excluded from the 2001/02 interim levy.

CONSULTATION

The Directors of Finance and Law and Administration have been consulted in the compilation of this report.

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Rights implications arising from the implementation of 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

A B Watson
Chief Executive

ABW/KP
Reports.COSLA Review

COSLA REVIEW 2001 CONSULTATION SURVEY

Please answer all of the questions and then detach and return this form to **T N Aitchison, Chief Executive, The City of Edinburgh Council, Council Headquarters, Wellington Court, 10 Waterloo Place, EDINBURGH, EH1 3EG.** Where answers to questions are in the form of a choice, e.g. YES or NO, please circle the correct answer.

Please note that all returns will be treated sensitively. However, should your Council wish to ensure that it is not identifiable in the report to the Convention, please tick the box below.

I do not wish my Council to be identifiable

2. FINANCIAL CONTEXT

1. Do you have any general views on how COSLA might reduce its costs or increase its income?

1. Identify what is core business and reduce staffing accordingly
2. Run conferences/courses/seminars but without duplicating what Councils do themselves within their own training programmes.
3. Have a section dealing with courses/conferences/seminars with specific profit targets
4. Examine office location. Aim to reduce property overhead. Keep the matter under review even if savings are not possible in the short term. Accessibility to all Councils and proximity to the Scottish Parliament both important.
5. Maximise income from room hire and possible sub-leasing of part of the premises.

2. Assuming that the three Councils which have left remain out of COSLA, do you think a separate charge should be levied on these Councils in respect of the employers' function?
Yes No

3. If there was a separate charge for the employers' function do you think that this would encourage more Councils to opt out of full membership to COSLA?

Yes No

3. COSLA OVERVIEW

- 4. Do you agree that in representing the collective views of Councils, COSLA's core activities are representing local government and influencing policy development, finance and its role as an employers' organisation?

Yes No

The order of priorities should be as follows:

1. Finance
2. Employers organisation
3. Representing the collective interests of Councils – campaigning; influencing legislation and policy development
4. Support in respect of major corporate strategic issues.

5. Are there any other areas in which you consider COSLA should play an important role?
If yes, please specify. Yes No

Other Important Areas

Support in respect of major corporate strategic issues

6. What do you consider should be the balance between the various activities?
(Please apportion a % to add up to a total of 100%)

Representing Local Government	15%
Influencing Policy Development	15%
Finance	35%
An employers' organisation	30%
Other (if applicable)	5%
Total	100%

4. **WHAT DOES COSLA DO?**

7. To what extent do you believe that the current difficulties facing COSLA may be caused by the strains imposed on COSLA as it tries to adjust to a considerably increased workload and representational role, brought about by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive?

The advent of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive has certainly changed the context in which CoSLA has to operate. However, any strains on the organisation have been self-imposed in so far as they have simply added to their remit, and therefore their costs, without taking Councils with them. They have underestimated the effect of the financial constraints which Councils have had to bear as a result of the government's financial policies which has resulted in many elected members finding it unacceptable that CoSLA should expand when they are being forced to reduce front-line services. This problem should have been foreseen, and priorities should have been realigned – as they have had to be within individual Councils.

Greater use could also have been made of a Task Group approach, involving Council staff to a greater extent, rather than appointing or seeking secondments of individuals whose operation creates a different dynamic.

To some extent, CoSLA has lost sight of its principal aim of promoting and protecting Councils and has been focusing too much of its activities on translating the Scottish Executive's policies to local government and, as part of this activity, setting in place monitoring and review mechanisms to ensure that local government is responding to the Government's agenda.

Also, the views put forward by CoSLA are those of the majority and more could be done properly to represent the views of all Councils. A uniform perspective is not helpful when different Councils have quite different perspectives.

8. What is your view on what has been achieved for Scottish local government by COSLA in 2000?

Very good Good Neither good nor poor Poor Very Poor

9. Do you consider:

(i) That COSLA represents value for money? Yes No

(ii) That the work programme undertaken in 2000 was focussed around the key issues for local government in Scotland?

Yes No

10. Has COSLA struck the right balance of workload and emphasis of relationship in its dealings with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive?

Yes No

11. How satisfied are you with COSLA's work on local government finance and related issues?

Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

12. How satisfied are you with COSLA's role as an employers' organisation?

Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied
nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

13. With pay deals secured for the next 3-4 years, do you think there is scope to scale back on the organisational development team?

Yes No

14. How satisfied are you with COSLA's communications activities?

Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied
nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

15. Do you think there is any scope to reduce expenditure in this area?

Yes No

16. How satisfied are you with COSLA's work in the corporate strategy/service development areas?

Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied
nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

17. Do you see this area increasing or decreasing over the next three years?

Increasing Decreasing

18. Do you think this is an area which COSLA should consider becoming more involved in or less involved in? If you see an increasing role for COSLA, how should that be carried out?

More involved Less Involved

There is no doubt that some of CoSLA's achievements have been very significant and would not have happened without CoSLA's efforts. However:

1. Finance and Organisational Development (2 of the main roles) between them account for only 25% of the current staff complement.
2. There are fears that CoSLA is becoming too much an agency of the Scottish Executive, intent on introducing monitoring systems to ensure that Councils deliver on the Government's agenda.
3. Although the abandonment of the old Committee system, the introduction of leaders' Meetings and the appointment of Spokespersons have streamlined the workings of CoSLA, there is less ownership of the organisation than previously. Many elected members are now very far removed from the workings of CoSLA and see it as being run by a select few.

19. What role do you think Scottish local government, through COSLA, should have in relation to European affairs?

There must be mechanisms to allow Scottish local government to relate to Europe. However, given Scotland Europa's presence in Brussels, and the existence of ESEC and WOSEC, there is a strong case for reviewing current arrangements and assessing whether CoSLA is the best avenue.

20. Would you support a review of ESEC, WOSEC and COSLA's activities in European affairs?
Yes No

5. POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

21. How satisfied are you with the current political management arrangements within COSLA?

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	<u>Dissatisfied</u>	Very dissatisfied
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22. Specifically, how satisfied are you with:

The Convention:

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	<u>Dissatisfied</u>	Very dissatisfied
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Leaders' Meetings:

Very satisfied	Satisfied	<u>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</u>	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
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The Spokesperson model:

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	<u>Dissatisfied</u>	Very dissatisfied
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The General Purposes Group:

Very satisfied	Satisfied	<u>Neither satisfied Nor dissatisfied</u>	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
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6. FINANCING COSLA

23. What increase in the levy would you be prepared to support?

3% - but would be prepared to consider any majority view to the contrary, to include the scope of the package of measures put in place

24. Would you support a review of the present population-based method of subscribing to COSLA and the introduction of a "Core" element to the levy?

Such a move would be counter-productive

Yes No

25. Do you favour a policy of increased income generation within COSLA?

Yes No

26. Do you have any specific proposals as to how income might be increased?

See response to 2.1

27. Given COSLA's budget position, what specific measures do you think should be taken to reduce expenditure?

On the face of it, a Chief Executive and 5 Directors for a total staff of 49 seems top heavy. Given the core priorities identified, consideration should be given to something of the following nature:

CHIEF EXECUTIVE + DIRECTOR OF FINANCE + DIRECTOR OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT + CONVENTION MANAGER

- The Chief Executive, as well as having overall responsibility for the effective and efficient management of the CoSLA would have direct responsibility for Corporate Strategy and Service Development, aided by an appropriate number of policy/research staff
- There should be a Public Relations Manager, with appropriate back-up, reporting direct to the Chief Executive.
- There should be an IT Manager, with appropriate back-up, reporting either direct to the Chief Executive, or possibly to the Director of Finance
- The current Finance Team should remain intact; the current Organisational Development Team should be reviewed.

Other Relevant Comments

It is essential that Scottish local government has an organisation representing its interests. If CoSLA were to fold entirely, it would have to be re-invented. Given the scale of the financial reduction necessary, it is a matter of extreme urgency that there be clear agreement on core business and that the staffing structure required to deliver that core business be identified. The political parties should make every effort to bring Glasgow, Falkirk and Clackmannan back on board.

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