Local Government Committee

22nd Meeting, 2002

Tuesday 17 September 2002

The Committee will meet at 2.00 pm in the Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh

1. **Items in private:** The Committee will consider whether to take items 3, 4 and 5 in private.

2. **Renewing Local Democracy - Phase 2 inquiry:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   COSLA:
   Pat Watters, President
   Jon Harris, Director of Policy and Legislation

   Angus Council:
   Stewart Maxwell, Principal Community Education Officer
   Susan Robb, Former Chair, Angus Youth Congress/Dialogue Youth
   Councillor Glennis Middleton, Chair of Dialogue Youth Management Group

3. **Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider a draft Stage 1 report.

4. **Local Government in Scotland Bill:** The Committee will consider a draft Stage 1 report.

5. **Proportional Representation (Local Government Elections) (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will consider proposals for consideration of the Bill at Stage 1.

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The following papers are attached for this meeting:

**Agenda item 2**
Submission from COSLA LG/02/22/1
Submission from Angus Council LG/02/22/2

**Agenda item 3**
Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Bill: LG/02/22/3
Summary of Evidence [PRIVATE]

**Agenda item 4**
Local Government in Scotland Bill: Draft Stage 1 Report [PRIVATE] TO FOLLOW LG/02/22/4
Submission from the Equal Opportunities Committee [PRIVATE] LG/02/22/5
Submission from the Health and Community Care Committee [PRIVATE] LG/02/22/6
Submission from the Education, Culture and Sport Committee [PRIVATE] LG/02/22/7
Submission from the Subordinate Legislation Committee [PRIVATE] TO FOLLOW LG/02/22/8

**Agenda item 5**
Proportional Representation (Local Government Elections) (Scotland) Bill – Paper from the Convener [PRIVATE] LG/02/22/9
RENEWING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Section 1 - Introduction
1. The thread running through this response is that the focus of action arising from the White Paper must be to secure and promote a strong and effective system of local government in Scotland which builds on and enhances the uniqueness of local government as a level of local democracy and the political accountability of councils.

2. As we approach the end of the first term of the Scottish Parliament it is clear that devolution has delivered many benefits for the people of Scotland both in the approach to developing public policy and in giving people more direct access to Government. However, we believe that now that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have established themselves as a fundamental part of Scottish public life the time is right to address some of the longstanding concerns of local government. These include tensions between national and local priorities; financial dependency and lack of financial flexibility such as ring fencing of resources; a view of local government as just another service provider delivering to prescribed standards and controlled through monitoring and increasing central direction through a prescriptive framework of statute and guidance. The overarching strand linking these is the development of a relationship with the Executive and the Parliament which recognises local government’s key role and secures action to promote a strong system of local government.

3. One route to reinforcing local government’s role and legitimacy would be to deliver formal constitutional protection for local government. It is slightly disappointing that the White Paper does not consider this and more radical change. COSLA would urge that the follow up to the White Paper must focus on action which can help to significantly change the terms of the relationship otherwise it will be viewed not as true democratic renewal but the rhetoric of democratic renewal.

Section 2 - Removing barriers
4. COSLA believes that we should be taking all possible steps to remove the barriers to making councils more representative of the make-up of the community. There is no single solution to this problem, and the ideas presented below should be regarded as elements that can be packaged in a number of different ways, depending on local concerns and circumstances. We suggest however that this issue as a whole can be approached at two broad levels:

- demonstrating our confidence that local elections capture the votes of representative sections of the population
- encouraging people from representative cross-sections of the population to stand for political office.

5. A third approach is enhancing democratic participation outwith formal democratic processes. It is considered under strengthening links with communities (see paragraphs 17-26 below) but it also has implications for representative democracy as well. Representative and participative forms of democracy should be seen as sitting side by side with one another.
Voter participation

6. Local elections on average attract only 40 per cent of the electorate (compared with over 70 per cent at general elections). While the reasons for this are not always clear, there is evidence that the individual's age, residential mobility, housing tenure and involvement in the political process have some influence on the decision to vote or not. A key factor is an individual's perception of whether or not the council has the ability to “make a difference”.

7. Promoting participation at elections should not just be left to party political campaigning. COSLA believes that councils themselves can also play a pro-active non-partisan role, supported by well co-ordinated campaign work at a national level. Various things can be done to promote voter participation:

- promoting a positive image of local government and relating work of the council and councillors to the everyday concerns of the general public – with COSLA playing a leading role in this regard
- conducting targeted campaigns (leaflets, talks, advertising, broadcasts, websites, etc) to encourage people to register to vote and to cast their vote, particularly among young people in schools, colleges, sports and other clubs, etc.
- issuing “use your vote” literature in disability and other special formats and in ethnic minority languages
- giving voters more choice (and supporting information) about when, where and how to cast their vote, for example, through weekend voting/increased hours of voting, choice of polling station, voting by telephone, use of mobile polling booths (e.g. in hospitals, residential homes), experimental use of new technology (e.g. use voter smart cards at shopping centres, etc)
- offering practical assistance to people having difficulties reaching polling stations or in casting their vote, for example, through volunteer support and enhanced facilities at polling stations.

Encouraging political service in local government

8. As acknowledged in the White Paper, the age, gender, socio-economic and other characteristics of councillors are not representative of the general population. There is an under representation of women, young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and the business community. The factors that deter people from standing as councillors (or seeking re-election) are varied and complex. They include concerns about:

- capacity of local government to bring about real change
- difficulties of combining a political career with full-time employment or bringing up a family
- the demands on the time of councillors (meetings, travel, preparation, etc) and the range of work covered
- a consequential reduction of income, where only partially offset by councillors’ existing allowances
- lack of party political allegiance

9. Perceptions about the capacity of local government to deliver should become more positive as councils develop their strong community leadership role in the community planning process. This should also increase voter turnout as councils are given the freedom to be more innovative and responsive to the well-being of their communities.

10. Whilst the selection of election candidates is largely a party political matter, there are a number of actions that can be taken to attract people from under-represented groups to a career in local politics. COSLA believes that if we are going to make a difference we need to make a co-ordinated response involving all the initiatives set out below, including moving to a situation in which councillors receive a salary at a rate that properly reflects the nature of their job:
• political parties developing socially inclusive and equalities approaches to attracting party members and selecting election candidates

• provision of promotional but non-partisan information pack about the roles and work of councillors (both basic and additional responsibilities), and induction packs for newly-elected councillors (possibly comprising core materials developed at a national level into which council-based information could be slotted)

• councillors being provided with skills and other training, tailored to their background, experience and levels of responsibility (working within a national training and development framework for councillors)

• business of councils being run in ways that are participative, inclusive and sensitised to the circumstances and needs of councillors from under-represented groups; for example the timing, frequency, location, content, format, management conduct and length of meetings and the scope for streamlining council business through new technology (e-mail, video-conferencing, etc)

• councils (and political parties where appropriate) giving councillors good access to support services, including professional advice, information and research, secretarial and clerical assistance and facilities such as office accommodation, e-mail and internet access.

• assistance (in cash or kind) for councillors looking after dependent children or other relatives (about one in three women councillors have to make their own child care arrangements, compared with only one in 10 male councillors)

11. COSLA would also support the development of some form of “citizenship legislation” that would entitle employees to some time off to carry out certain duties as councillors. Serving as a councillor is a particular problem for people in the 21-45 age group who are both building up their career and raising families. The current position is that there is relevant legislation both reserved to Westminster and devolved to the Scottish Parliament, namely:

• Employment Rights Act 1996, section 50: Employers must give councillors time off for attendance at meetings or other approved council duties, as may be reasonable in all the circumstances taking account of the amount of time, impact of the absence on the employer’s business etc

• Local Government and Housing Act 1989, section 10: This sets out the maximum paid leave which councils can give an employee who is a councillor with another authority, of 208 hours in any one financial year.

12. COSLA would like to see an entitlement for all employees for a minimum amount of paid leave. There is also a case for retaining the maximum entitlement for paid leave but this should be extended to all employers. This new entitlement will impact on employers’ businesses and particularly on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). We believe, therefore, that there must be some provision for reimbursing those employers who are least able to accommodate an employee wishing to serve as a councillor. We also need to think of ways of demonstrating to employers the benefits to the business community of political service with the council. This could create a climate in which employers actively encouraged their employees to serve as councillors through flexible working and provision of career breaks as well as provision for paid leave.

13. This “citizenship” legislation would need to be considered by the Westminster Parliament and would at the very least require an amendment to the Employment Rights Act 1996. The Executive should work with us in promoting this as a piece of legislation to be included in the Government’s legislative programme for Westminster. Given the timescales that might be involved in achieving new legislation, we believe that an interim solution should be to provide employees on unpaid leave a level of remuneration consistent with the framework set out elsewhere in our response.
Legislative change

14. If we are to positively encourage a wider cross-section of the community to seek election, it is clearly necessary to change the legislation which prevents this from happening. COSLA, therefore welcomes the introduction of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act which in Scotland will be extended to all elections. We also welcome the Executive’s decision to amend the Local Government (Scotland) 1973 Act to allow persons of 18 years to qualify to hold office as a member of a local authority. We believe that the Local Government in Scotland Bill does provide a suitable legislative opportunity to do this as well as making provision to enable school children over the age of 16 years to be members of Education Committees.

15. COSLA supports the Executive’s decision to repeal the legislation establishing a salary threshold and amending the legislation dealing with the requirement to resign on nomination as a candidate. We would expect the proposed non-statutory guidance on “posts providing policy advice” to be prepared jointly with COSLA.

16. COSLA would support a review of the existing legislation which prohibits all retiring councillors from taking employment with the council for a period of one year. We want to see this restriction abolished. Whilst we recognise the importance of people’s perceptions and the need for councils to act fairly in all circumstances, we also need to recognise the human rights of retired councillors. In coming to these views, we are also reflecting the need to recruit teachers and social workers into council employment to meet skills gaps. COSLA would also support, wherever possible, removing the political restrictions upon other public sector employees wishing to stand for election as councillors. All public bodies should follow a similar approach to that proposal for council employees.

Links with communities

17. Councils are pro-actively seeking ways of improving links with their communities to enhance democratic participation. Among the ways being promoted are the following:

Alterning public perceptions of local democracy

18. Local democracy is still popularly perceived as about council elections every three or four years, and somewhat remote from or irrelevant to the everyday concerns of communities. This has adverse implications not only for voting behaviour but for public participation in the democratic process as a whole. We need to think through ways of not only promoting representative democracy at election times but also projecting local democracy as a continuing process of engagement with communities.

Engaging communities

19. Community engagement is about councils making themselves more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their communities (of place and interest) through such approaches as:

• improved communications between councils and their communities
• the use of surveys, panels, groupwork and other methods to assess the needs and wishes of their communities
• the extension of public participation in democratic decision making processes, for example, through area and interest forums and community representatives’ councils.
• community councils
• community learning

20. Many councils already engage with their communities in these ways, and the recently introduced Government in Scotland Bill will indeed require them to do so in carrying our their duty to facilitate community planning. Draft guidance associated with the Bill sets out a framework for
engaging with communities in community planning processes. The challenge for councils and their community planning partners will be to demonstrate to communities that their engagement through any of the above or other approaches will bring about real change – and enhance representative local democracy.

Improved communications
21. Councils can come closer to their communities by conveying to them in clear and convincing terms how local democracy is working for them, for example through imaginative use of community newspapers, handbooks, websites, road shows, open days, etc. An important ingredient is how well councils report on their performance to their communities under the best value and community planning frameworks. There is also a particular need to reach out to socially excluded communities and equalities groups, disengaged from formal democratic processes: by speaking and writing in ways that best engage them, through the use of disability and other special formats, translations into ethnic minority languages, or through informal face-to-face approaches (e.g. among young people).

Customer-citizen focus
22. The success of local democracy also depends on how well in tune councils are with the concerns of their communities. Councils in their best value and other work make use of a wide range of methods and techniques for finding out about communities’ use of and satisfaction with public services, the difficulties and problems people face, and the future aspirations of their communities. This not only helps to ensure that decisions about policies, services and resource allocation are better informed but also helps convince communities that councils care about and are acting upon their concerns between and not just at election times. Councils should continue to be given every encouragement to explore different methods and share good practices, for example, through the type of material produced by COSLA.

Participative democracy
23. Many councils support community and interest forums - what has come to be called a third tier of democracy – to wider public participation in democratic decision making processes. Forums bring together a wide range of community groups under a single umbrella to rationalise the representation of communities of place or interest (e.g. disability, older people or young peoples’ forums) in democratic processes. They can be seen as sitting side by side with and supporting formal representative democracy and enhancing the role of elected representatives, with whom they can forge good links. While such forums are not for every community - some will be content with traditional approaches to local democracy – councils will nonetheless want to explore with their communities and community planning partners the scope extending democratic participation in this or other ways (e.g. community representatives’ councils). The benefits and development of such an approach would need to be considered alongside its community capacity building and associated resourcing implications.

24. We need to consider the question raised in the White Paper about the future of co-opted members. This is already raised in paragraph 8 above in relation to school children aged 16 years or more being able to be members of education committees. COSLA is also promoting an amendment in the Local Government Bill to allow councils which have adopted a cabinet/scrutiny form of political management to have discretion as to whether religious representatives should sit on the cabinet or the relevant scrutiny committee.

Community councils
25. In many areas, community councils provide an important formal link between councils and their communities. Community councils face similar challenges as councils however in promoting public awareness and understanding of their role and work and in attracting members who are broadly representative of the community. Many of the suggestions above about enhancing public
participation both during and between elections apply with equal force to community councils. The linkages between community councils and other approaches to engaging with communities also require exploration, including the scope for joining up efforts, cutting out duplication and reducing consultation fatigue.

Community learning
26. Community learning (through informal as well as formal methods) has a key role to play in raising awareness and appreciation of the nature, role, importance and working of local democracy, among target groups in schools, colleges, youth and community groups, etc. This includes highlighting the critical importance of voting and the implications of not doing so. It particularly means reaching out to vulnerable people approaching voting age or who have already become disaffected or excluded from formal democratic processes. Community learning work should not however just be about understanding formal democratic processes. It should be about heightening in a non-partisan way people’s critical understanding of the issues that are the focus of public debate at and between elections.

Section 3 - Remuneration
27. The White Paper states that Ministers are committed to changing the current system of councillors’ allowances and to establishing some form of pension provision for councillors. This issue has been debated over some considerable time. Most recently the McIntosh Commission and the Kerley Group both recommended revisions to remuneration arrangements. It is essential that debate on this issue now comes to a conclusion. The case for a change to current arrangements is irrefutable; change needs to be enacted as a matter of priority.

28. COSLA’s submission is founded on the principle of achieving parity of esteem across the democratically elected tiers of government. National politicians consider and determine national policies and increasingly this is being done in partnership with local government, who also set local priorities. The Scottish Executive, however, has recognised that it cannot deliver on its priorities alone. In fact, the Scottish Executive itself does not deliver services. It provides resources and it sets national standards in key areas but delivery is down to local government and partners. In many respects, therefore, it could be argued that local councillors are more directly accountable to the electorate for their decisions and performance than national politicians.

29. In the past, there was perhaps a suggestion that there was a voluntary element to a local councillor’s job. As this response demonstrates and indeed as the White Paper clearly sets out, given the onerous nature and time commitment of a local councillor’s job and the need to put in place arrangements which make the position of being a local elected member an attractive prospect, revisions need to be made to arrangements to recognise the important status of the job. A locally elected member’s position is, therefore, not voluntary and is no different from that of an MP or MSP. This needs to be recognised by the introduction of suitable remuneration and pension arrangements.

30. It is essential that the package of the remuneration and pensions arrangements is fully funded. Further more detailed work is needed to evaluate the potential cost of any new arrangements. However, to provide a guide COSLA has modelled the possible cost of the proposals set out in this submission; the introduction of a basic salary and additional responsibility payments and pension arrangements within an appropriate employer’s contribution. Modelling suggests that, when compared to current basic and special responsibility allowance payments, there would be an increased cost compared to the current position but that this would still represent a very small percentage of overall local government spend. It is suggested that such a small cost is inexpensive when considered against the benefits of putting in place arrangements which recognise the democratic value and responsibilities of locally elected members across Scotland.
31. Detailed work has been undertaken by a Task Group and their report is available as a background paper. In summary:

- COSLA supports the introduction of an independent national remuneration committee to set a standardised basic salary for all councillors across Scotland with that level being updated on an annual basis. That committee should also be charged with setting a broad national framework for additional responsibility and salaried payments, with this framework giving flexibility for individual councils to introduce the most appropriate arrangements locally.

- There should be a direct link between the basic salary for a councillor and that of an MSP.

- Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that individual councils are placed in a position whereby they may put in place suitable support service arrangements for their local councillors.

- Elected members should have access to join a pension scheme, if they so wish. It would be discriminatory to deny this. Pension arrangements should be transferable to/from other schemes with councillors’ contributions to the Scheme being supported by an appropriate employer’s contribution. It is suggested that the Scottish Parliamentary Pension Scheme which applies to MSPs would be a model worthy of further investigation.

- If the provision of a pension scheme for councillors is taken forward and it is based on the MSPs’ Scheme then there would appear to be merit in also instituting a Severance Payment Scheme for Councillors along similar lines to that available to MSPs. It would form part of a “benefits package” that would serve to attract and retain high calibre councillors.

Section 4 - Electoral Reform

32. COSLA’s role must be to address and influence the key issues facing Scottish local government which include local government’s role; its status and credibility as a level of government; its resourcing; and constitutional issues impacting on its relationship with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. It is by addressing these issues that we will be able to achieve our aspirations for local government. The issue of low voter turnout should be sit alongside strengthening local government and should be addressed through the route of removing barriers and encouraging voter participation (see section 2 of this response).

33. Our strong view is that the debate on electoral reform is a diversion from action on these issues and in fact confuses matters. Like boundary changes and tinkering with local government’s functions, it is about fixing perceived problems without properly defining what they are. The evidence in the White Paper is particularly scant stating simply that there are supporters of alternative electoral systems.

34. The Minister for Finance and Public Services has himself said in the foreword to the White Paper that the Executive is committed to strengthening local governance and improving public services. We would urge the Scottish Executive to do that by working with COSLA to address our longstanding concerns about the measures needed that Scotland has strong and vibrant local government.
35. A strong and vibrant local government should not have to operate within a system of financial dependency on central government. It should have the freedom to deliver solutions which meet the needs of the communities it has been elected to serve. It should not be subject to central direction and control. It should not be possible to easily re-organise the boundaries and functions of a strong elected layer of government at local level. These are the issues we should be addressing and even if electoral reform was to be in place tomorrow it would not in itself deliver change on these aspirations.

36. On the various alternatives in the White Paper, there are three crucial factors from COSLA’s point of view. The first is maintenance of the member-ward link. Linked to that, we consider that the straightforward election of a community representative is more important than focusing on achieving proportionality at Council level in terms of votes cast across the Council area. And lastly, we strongly urge that any electoral system must be able to accommodate the election of independent Councillors. We do not believe that AMS, STV, or AV+ can deliver maintenance of the member-ward link as they are all multi member ward systems. Also multi member wards tend to be larger than wards under the current system and we do not believe that would be in the best interests of rural areas. The only alternative electoral system which can deliver on maintenance of the member ward link is AV which operates on the basis of one member per ward. However, it is a system of proportionality which would cut across our strong view that election of a community representative is more important than focusing on achieving proportionality at Council level in terms of votes cast across the Council area. Another disadvantage is that evidence makes it clear that while it may deliver proportionality at ward level it results in disproportionality at Council level.

37. The view of the majority of COSLA’s Councils therefore is that there should be no change to the status quo. We do not believe the case for change has been made. The First Past The Post System provides for strong political leadership of a Council with a clear mandate to carry through the programme of measures put to the electorate. It also provides a clear member-ward link and gives a fair opportunity for independent Councillors to be elected.

38. We would highlight, however, that there was also a committed minority view supporting change with a range of electoral systems being preferred including AV, AV+ and STV.

Section 5 - Improvement in Scottish Local Government

39. A joint COSLA/SOLACE submission regarding improvement in local government sets out further detail and is available as a background paper. However, there are certain key principles concerning improvement which are worthy of inclusion in the body of our response to the White Paper.

Key principles

- Continuous improvement must be at the heart of Scottish local government for two critical and related reasons. First, public expectations are continuously (and rightly) increasing. There will never be sufficient resources to meet expectations, but our responsibility in Scottish local government is to strive to ensure that resources are used in the most effective, efficient and economical way possible. Second, Councils will shortly have a statutory duty to make arrangements to secure best value – which is properly defined “as continuous improvement in the performance of the Council’s functions”. Thus the overarching context for continuous improvement in local government is that of Best Value.

- Local government employs a significant workforce of more than 280,000 employees. In order to bring about continuous improvement in the performance of this workforce
significant investment in skills and development is required. There is evidence that investment is happening and this is reflected in the continuing improvement indicated in the Controller of Audit's report covering the years 1998/99 to 2000/01. However, as continuous improvement is now a statutory feature of Scottish local government, permanent investment in skills and development will be required.

- Current investment in skills and development is inconsistent across Scottish local government with the overall level of investment per employee comparing unfavourably with similar investment in England and Wales. Furthermore, Local Government in Scotland has no equivalent of an institution like the Tulliallan Police College to provide a focus for continuous commitment and investment in the training of our staff.

Current Position
40. COSLA accepts the proposal from Ministers in the White Paper for the development of a new service which would support continuous improvement. We believe that a starting point for the creation of such a service is the ownership of the improvement agenda by local government at the level of individual Councils, but also collectively.

41. In creating this new service there is a recognition that much of the opportunity for improvement is across the public sector rather than simply within local government. This is particularly true given the importance of the Community Planning approach. However, considering the current differential of investment in skills development across the public sector, COSLA proposes that this new service would initially focus on local government with an intention to extend provision across the public sector only when a common platform amongst public agencies has been achieved.

The Way Ahead
42. Any new service should focus on what local government should collectively do in pursuing continuous improvement. The key areas are as follows:

- Skills development and building organisational capacity (including leadership skills and the skills of all employees and all members).
- Providing support and challenge to Councils' search for continuous improvement.
- Facilitating the sharing of knowledge and best practice both across local government and with our community planning partners.
- Providing or facilitating mutual self-help.

43. To address these issues, we propose a new Improvement Partnership for Scottish Local Government. The make-up of this partnership needs to reflect the genuine ownership of the improvement agenda by local government and a degree of independence from it. There must be an effective balance between support for local government as well as a challenge to it. It is proposed that the partnership should have a small Board comprising 3 representatives from COSLA, 1 from SOLACE, 1 from APSE along with individual representatives of SODOPS, STUC, the Executive and Audit Scotland. The Board would provide a funding route for resources from the Executive to local government. It would also be valuable to have an independent person on the Board to provide objective input to public services.

44. We see the primary role of the partnership as co-ordinating, facilitating and accrediting improvement work. An immediate priority for the partnership would be a fundamental review of existing opportunities and provision in both the public and private sector with a view to
securing better co-ordination and identification of gaps in provision. It is not envisaged that this partnership would have a primary role in the delivery of services.

45. We would stress that the model recommended must not become a huge bureaucracy. It should be small and run as cost effectively as possible. A business plan will be produced for the partnership based on securing the resources to undertake four principle functions:

   a. **Diagnostic** – providing support and challenge to Councils in their journey of continuous Improvement. In this context we see the partnership as the logical body to take forward the work of the Leadership Advisory Panel.

   b. **The Information Exchange**– in England, IdeA Knowledge is a web based service aimed at sharing information on performance practice and innovation. It is clear that Scottish local government needs a similar provision to share best practice and experience, not just from within local government, but from other parts of the public sector.

   c. **Skills Development & Building Organisational** – the partnership will have an important role in supporting Councils in identifying new skill requirements, common training needs and cost-effective methods of procuring service.

   d. **Providing Mutual Self-Help** – the objective of the partnership should be to create a climate of mutual self-help in Scottish local government with a clear focus on support and improvement, not failure. The partnership must be seen as a genuine critical friend, an asset to local government and not a prescriptive ‘Big Brother’.

46. In order to ensure the partnership is properly resourced to undertake the whole range of functions outlined above, we believe there will be a requirement for a significant budget to support this work. This must be transparently new money for local government and not top sliced from existing resources. The detailed business plan for the partnership will identify the exact level of resources required. The White Paper “Renewing Local Democracy” states that local government is key to Scotland’s success. Ensuring that success requires the creation of an adequately resourced, effective and credible improvement partnership for Scottish local government.

**Section 6 - Capital Expenditure**

47. The following is a summary of COSLA’s response to comments within the White Paper on capital expenditure. Fuller detail is available in the background paper.

48. A key to tackling some of the current pressures on revenue budgets and to transforming services is substantial capital investment in the short term. There is a major investment need in local government both to address much needed investment in existing infrastructures and to take forward the modernisation agenda.

49. Such investment need cannot be delivered under current resource and system constraints. The system which is currently in place is, in essence, preventative rather than enabling. It is rules based and is over-complicated. The system also does not, through year-end flexibility, carry forward etc arrangements adequately recognise the longer term nature of capital investment.

50. COSLA, therefore, welcomes plans to abolish existing controls and replace these by a system of professionally endorsed prudential safeguards designed for use at a local level. These should recognise the diversity of individual councils. These measures must be supported by a
firm commitment from central government to provide funding on a sustainable basis, sufficient to allow councils to address investment needs.

**Housing Capital**

51. COSLA has major concerns over the Scottish Executive’s proposals not to extend the application of a new prudential framework to housing investment.

52. Good housing is seen as essential to good health, social justice and welfare. The government is seeking to address the issues of social exclusion and the general improvement of public services by reinforcing links between services. Good housing has a high influence on health and displays a strong correlation with academic achievement. It is also central to a range of social issues such as the successful re-introduction of offenders into society and the success or otherwise of young children in care integrating into society. Furthermore, a substantial majority of Council house tenants are now elderly, receiving a range of curative and palliative care.

53. The abolition of Section 94 consent restrictions would enable Councils to select the most suitable method for financing capital works within a prudential framework.

54. A consistent approach between the HRA and the General Fund is essential as both would be borrowing through the statutory loans’ pool used by all Councils as the mechanism for the management of external debt.

55. Councils capacity to invest in housing is currently significantly restricted by the requirement to apply 75% of receipts generated to redeem outstanding debt. The set aside arrangements were removed for non-housing from August 1998 and, recognising the developments which have taken place over the last few years and the future direction for housing provision, the Scottish Executive should now remove the set aside requirement for housing.

**Regulatory Framework On Investments**

It is essential that the Scottish Executive takes the earliest legislative opportunity to review provisions in Scotland which are still underpinned by the 1975 Act.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE MEETING – TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2002

PRESENTATION OF EVIDENCE BY ANGUS COUNCIL

Present:

Stewart Maxwell, Principal Community Education Officer and Lead Officer for Dialogue Youth; **Councillor Glennis Middleton**, Chair of Policy and Resources Youth Sub Group and Angus Dialogue Youth Initiative; and **Susan Robb**, Former Chair, Angus Youth Congress, Forfar Youth Council and Dialogue Youth Committee member.

INTRODUCTION

The following paper outlines specific actions taking by Angus Council to encourage greater involvement by young people to become active citizens and in doing so play an active and constructive role in the decision making process.

The paper focuses on two specific initiatives, which best illustrate this in practice. These are:

- Angus Youth Congress
- Angus Dialogue Youth Initiative

ANGUS YOUTH CONGRESS

**Background:**

Young people from throughout Angus were invited to come together and form the Angus Youth Steering Group in May 1998. The aim of the Steering Group was to invite young people between the ages of 14 – 22 years of all social and economical backgrounds, from throughout Angus to a seminar to discuss the idea of establishing a Youth Congress and eight local Youth Councils. (One for each Community Forum area.)

The seminar was a major success with the Angus Youth Forum and eight Youth Councils established in January 1999. The purpose of the Youth Councils was that they identify and manage the priorities in their local area. Each council elected its own office bearers and most importantly selected 2 representatives to join the Youth Congress.
Aims and Objectives:
Aim -
• To promote the voice of young people through out the Angus Council areas whilst encouraging maximum participation and creating the opportunity for young people to gain self-confidence and skills which will enhance and develop their future development.

Objective –
• To encourage young people in Angus to take an interest in their community and to have an unbiased involvement in policies and issues that have direct bearing on the future of all young people in Angus.

Angus Council Support:
Angus Council supported the initiative in terms of:

• Free use of premises for meetings
• Access to Community Education Service support at both Youth Congress and Youth Council levels
• Funding a dedicated support worker for the Congress
• Travel and subsistence for young people attending meetings
• Regular joint meetings between Youth Congress and members of Angus Council
• Formalised reporting relationship to the Policy and Resources Committee

Both the Youth Congress and Youth Councils are held in high esteem by the Council and indeed report directly to senior politicians on the Council Policy and Resources Committee. Over the years Congress sub-groups have organised debates on issues such as youth facilities, relationships with the police, alcohol and transport, which remains a key issue for young people living in remote rural communities.

Initially the Council gave £40,000 per year from its budget led funds but from 1 April 2001 this was mainstreamed as part of the new “Dialogue Youth” initiative with the Congress retaining its own identity but also participating as full partners in the new initiative.

Understandably the membership is not static and young people enter and leave on a regular basis and some members have gone on to become members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. The structure is reviewed regularly with a major residential youth conference currently planned for October. This conference which will involve between 80 –90 young people, will take place in Dunoon and from this the way forward for youth participation in Angus will be agreed.
DIALOGUE YOUTH

The Angus Dialogue Youth Initiative was one of the 3 pilot projects set up across Scotland and received funding of £230,000 from the Scottish Executive for 3 years as part of its Phase 1 (MGF1) Modernising Government initiative. In addition Angus Council contributed £70,000.

Angus along with the other Scottish Local authorities were part of a successful MGF2 bid which is now being rolled out across Scotland.

In terms of the original project the key aims were:

- To provide a focal point for engaging with young people in developing the full potential of new technology in providing accessible, relevant information
- To stimulate lifelong learning, youth mobility, community safety, healthy lifestyles and enterprise education among young people through the use of new technology
- To promote active citizenship by stimulating and supporting greater involvement by young people in the life of their communities
- To promote social inclusion by involving young people as a full partners in the design, management and delivery of services and facilities
- To promote cross- departmental and joint agency approaches to the delivery of services for young people.

Dedicated premises entitled “No 1 for Youth” opened in January 2002 in Forfar. This facility is well located on the High Street offering an easily accessible shop front youth information service. In addition to offering public access terminals for young people the facility also has an upstairs suite of offices which acts as the nerve centre for the on line information service and provide access to a range of youth related agencies. Young people along with a range of youth and information workers staff the project.

The Project Management Group is made up of key Council officers, police, health and young people from both the Congress and local Youth Councils. This has been the critical key to its success in that young people are key players. Angus Youth Congress have been a key partner from the start with young people involved in a residential weekend in October 2000 along with Council Officers, the Chief Executive and members of Young Scot which resulted in the draft action plan.

In terms of the on line access young people can electronically access the service from all Angus schools, youth centres, libraries and from home no matter how remote the location. This is particularly valuable in a rural authority like Angus where a number of young people live in isolated communities.
Through attractive presentation and use of a medium that young people are comfortable and familiar with, young people actively express their views electronically on a wide range of topics via the “Vote of the Day”, through the National Young Scot interactive youth portal which opened on 17 May.

From the experience in Angus it is evident that young people are participating and in doing so are keen to make their views known. In addition young people in Angus are developing an on line youth magazine. There is also a local Website Editorial Team known as DYCE (Dialogue Youth Consultative Editorial).

Negotiations are well advanced to put voluntary sector youth work providers on line to enable young people complete access to the information network. This involves supplying the COMMS equipment enabling high speed INTERNET access via the Councils’ Broadband network at a fixed cost. A Service Level Agreement is currently being drafted with installation to be completed by Christmas.

Another part of the project is the Angus Young Scot Initiative:

**ANGUS YOUNG SCOT**

The Angus Young Scot initiative was launched on 29 January 2002 and is aimed at young people between the specific ages of 12 – 18 who live in Angus. This is being offered free and to date between 80% - 90% of young people in this age group have signed up.

The pack contains:

- An Angus Young Scot Card that has the young person’s name, date of birth and photograph securely printed on it. The card has “smart “ electronic features that allow them to access a range of services including school meals access to leisure facilities etc. It also acts as a discount card giving 10% off when purchasing goods. The card can be used nationally and is recognised in a large number of European countries. This encourages youth mobility.

- They also receive a youth information handbook. This handbook is attractively presented and contains seventeen different sections covering important areas such as employment / welfare benefits, education, housing, relationships and the law.

The project is being well received by young people, evidenced by the increasing demand. We have recently completed the new S1 intake with in excess of 90% uptake. There has been considerable interest from other Scottish authorities with a substantial number of visits and enquiries to date.
With the advent of MGF2 we are currently in negotiations with colleagues from Health Promotion with a view to developing a range of young people related services including on line access. The introduction of a new generation of Smartcards is also being considered increasing the range of services offered.

CONCLUSION

The above initiatives have been a success due to a number of factors:

- Strong financial support from Angus Council
- A commitment by both elected representatives and Council officers to see young people play their part not in any tokenistic way but as genuine partners in decision making
- Strong leadership by key Councillors and the Chief Executive to make both these initiatives happen
- Willingness by young people to get involved and make their views known
- Pitching the promotional material at the right level
- Securing the co-operation of secondary head teachers
- Picking up funding opportunities and running with them – delivering the goods
- Practising what we preach!

Video Clip

To conclude we would like to run a short video clip of Angus Dialogue Youth. This footage was taken as part of the Transforming Scotland Initiative held earlier this year, which should help give a better understanding of what the initiative is about.

We will be happy to take questions after that.