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Copy to: The Leaders of all Scottish local authorities

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Dear David

Thank-you to you, Cllr Cook and the COSLA political leadership for participating in negotiations over recent weeks on the shape of the Local Government settlement for 2017-18. I have sought to engage with you and your team on the basis of openness and mutual respect and with the intention of building relationships around shared ambitions for people and communities.

As a result of these negotiations, I am able to set out the package of proposals below which I believe are a fair and reasonable offer that delivers on our shared ambitions. This letter, therefore, contains proposals for the local government finance settlement for 2017-18 resulting from the 2016 Budget process.

While the terms of the settlement have been negotiated through COSLA on behalf of its member councils, the same proposal is being offered to those councils who are represented by the Scottish Local Government Partnership. I believe this proposal opens the way for a new partnership between the Scottish Government and COSLA and, from that, the wider benefits of partnership working, including joint work on public service reform.

The Scottish Government and local government share the same ambitions for stronger communities, a fairer society and a thriving economy. This funding proposal delivers a fair financial settlement for local government, which will be strengthened by our joint working to improve outcomes for local people by improving educational attainment and through health and social care integration.

Following the work of the joint Settlement and Distribution Group, details of the indicative allocations to individual local authorities for 2017-18 are also being published today as set out in Local Government Finance Circular No. 9/2016.

I have carefully considered the representations made to me by COSLA and this is reflected in the detail of the settlement and the package of measures included in this letter.



My aim throughout our extensive discussions has been to reach an agreement with councils around the implementation of these commitments. I now invite local authorities to agree the terms of the settlement which are set out below.

Under the settlement we will look to all local authorities to work in partnership with the Scottish Government in pursuit of our Joint Priorities, including delivery of the Government's programme as set out in *A Plan For Scotland: The Scottish Government's Programme For Scotland 2016-17* published on 6 September and the *Draft Budget 2017-18*.

Renewing our partnership approach will enable close working on public service reform building on recent joint political and joint officer discussions.

On key priorities and following consideration of specific points you have raised I propose the following:

Public Service Reform

As an essential partner in the delivery of public services, the Cabinet sub-committee on Public Service Reform prioritised early discussion with COSLA to explore how we might work together around our shared priorities of health & social care, education attainment & governance, tackling inequalities & inclusive growth and enterprise, innovation, skills & employability. This political engagement and the productive discussions which followed at official level, including SOLACE, is an example of what we can achieve through a re-setting of partnership working at national level.

The Cabinet sub-committee anticipates further dialogue with COSLA on these emerging themes early in the New Year.

Health and Social Care

In 2017-18 an additional £107 million will be transferred from NHS Boards to Integration Authorities to protect our collective investment in social care. Of which, £100 million will support continued delivery of the Living Wage, sleepovers and sustainability in the care sector, and £7 million to disregarding the value of war pensions from financial assessments for social care and pre-implementation work in respect of the new carers legislation. This is additional to the £250 million added in the 2016-17 budget, bringing the total support available from the NHS through Integration Authorities to protect social care to £357 million. NHS contributions to Integration Authorities for delegated health functions will be maintained at least at 2016-17 cash levels. The provision included for sleepovers (£10 million) will be reviewed in year to consider its adequacy, with a commitment to discuss and agree how any shortfall should be addressed. To reflect this additional support local authorities will be able to adjust their allocations to integration authorities in 2017-18 by up to their share of £80 million below the level of budget agreed with their Integration Authority for 2016-17 (as adjusted where agreed for any one-off items of expenditure which should not feature in the baseline). Taken together, these measures will enable Integration Authorities to ensure the collective overall level of funding for social care is maintained at £8 billion. I am sure you would agree that that would be a significant achievement and reflects the shared priorities of local government, the NHS and the Scottish Government.

Education (including the Attainment Fund)

I have considered the representations made on the Scottish Government proposals to adjust the local government settlement to pave the way for an additional £100 million investment per year, generated through reform of council tax, to go directly to schools to close the gap in the educational attainment of young people from Scotland's most and least deprived areas.

I can now confirm that provision for the additional funding to meet our commitments on the Attainment Fund will be met directly from the resources available to the Scottish Government at a national level, rather than from an adjustment to the local government finance settlement.

As the next step towards investing £750 million over the life of this Parliament we will go further than our manifesto commitment and will increase the additional resource to be made available directly to schools through the Attainment Scotland Fund from £100 million to £120 million in 2017-18. This will be paid as a ring fenced grant and distributed on the basis of P1 to S3 pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, as part of the local government settlement.

It is a condition of this agreement that this funding is additional to each council's individual spending on schools rather than substitutional and is to be used at the discretion of schools to close the attainment gap between children from the least and most deprived areas within their communities. This is on top of the existing £50 million Attainment Scotland funding that will continue to provide targeted support for those authorities and schools supporting children and young people in greatest need.

In addition, we will continue to require local authorities to maintain the overall pupil:teacher ratio at 2016-17 levels as reported in the Summary of School Statistics published on 13 December 2016, and secure places for all probationers who require one under the teacher induction scheme. This is supported by a continued funding package of £88 million, made up of £51 million to maintain teacher numbers and £37 million to support the teacher induction scheme.

As previously made clear, all of the additional £111 million of Council Tax income raised by the Council Tax banding reforms we have implemented will be retained by each local authority area and, as a result of these decisions, the allocation of that funding will be for councils themselves to take based on their own local needs and priorities.

Local Taxation

2016-17 was the ninth consecutive year of the Council Tax freeze. As we have made clear this will be lifted from 2017-18, when Councils will have greater flexibility and may choose to increase Council Tax by up to a maximum of 3%. This local discretion will preserve the financial accountability of local government, whilst also potentially generating up to £70 million to support services.

Our reforms of Council Tax are only the first steps, and the Scottish Government is fully committed to further engagement with COSLA as we seek to make local taxation as a whole fair and progressive. We will work with COSLA to consider your objectives for local tax reform as set out in the Local Government Funding Review.

We will also deliver our commitment for local government to retain the net incomes from the Crown Estate for the benefit of island and coastal communities. In addition we will explore with authorities other opportunities for the development of fair and equitable local taxation that supports economic growth and public services.

Overall Settlement

As a result of the measures above, the total revenue funding for 2017-18 will be £9,496.4 million, which includes non-domestic rates incomes in 2017-18 of £2,605.8 million.

Capital funding is set at £756.5 million and delivers on our agreed commitment to maintain the local government share of the overall Scottish Government capital budget. I can also reaffirm the commitment to repay £150 million of re-profiled 2016-17 capital with an additional allocation in the period 2018-20.

The total funding which the Scottish Government will provide to local government in 2017-18 through the settlement, including the £120 million of additional support for educational attainment, is £10,252.9 million.

This is a fair settlement for Local Government.

With the addition of the real spending power that comes from the opportunity to raise up to an additional £181 million from Council Tax plus an additional £107 million to support the integration of Health and Social Care, the total spending power available to local authorities from the Scottish Government, and through local taxation will be up to £10,541 million, a total of £241 million more than was available in 2016-17, an increase of around 2.3%.

The difference between the figures reported in the Draft Budget in 2016-17 and 2017-18 will be potential spending on local government services of an increase of £266.8 million, or 2.6%.

In return for this settlement and in pursuit of our Joint Priorities, individual local authorities will deliver the specific commitments set out above.

Engagement

In line with our partnership approach we will work jointly with local government to support delivery of these commitments and undertake a review to monitor progress at an agreed mid-point in the year.

The measures set out in the settlement offer must be viewed as a package to protect our shared priorities and intensify a journey of reform. In order to access all of the benefits involved, including those priorities supported by specific financial benefits, local authorities must agree to deliver all of the measures set out in the package and will not be able to select elements of the package.

Any individual authority not intending to agree the offer and accept the full package of measures and benefits should write to me by no later than **Friday 13 January 2017**. For those authorities not agreeing the offer a revised, and inevitably less favourable, offer will be made.

Local government is essential to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of every community in Scotland. The Scottish Government are committed to work together in partnership with local authorities to do all that we can to support local authorities to ensure that the full package of agreed measures is delivered.

John *St* *Derek Mackay*
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