

# Local Governance Review

## Democracy Matters

### Introduction

In December 2017, the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly launched a Local Governance Review, which aims to make sure local communities have more say about how public services in their area are run. UNISON's Scottish Council considered the issues raised by the review at its February meeting.

On 28 May 2018 the Scottish Government published a suite of materials to support a highly inclusive conversation about community decision-making.

### Context

The context for the review is the Christie Commission principles, which almost everyone remains committed to, even if the application has been a patchy in practice. The Community Empowerment Act aims to give communities opportunities to engage with public services. There are participatory budgeting pilots and plans to give community councils some limited budgetary powers.

At a national level, there has been further devolution from Westminster and the prospects of more following the Brexit process. There has also been the development of regional partnerships, including city deals, FE colleges and school governance. This is not limited to local government, as NHS Scotland and some quangos are also starting to work on this basis.

There is also a growing civil society movement that makes the case for local decision making and rejects a 'one size fits all' approach to local governance. There have also been a number of initiatives to press this case including COSLA's Local Democracy Commission and think tank reports from IPPR, Carnegie Trust, Reid Foundation, Fabian Society, LGIU and others.

### Scope of the review

The Review brings a wide range of Scotland's public services into scope, not simply limited to local government. The Review will include powers and functions held at national level, although it will not make changes to reforms where work is already progressing under a different arrangement, for example in education governance.

The Review is based on a shared recognition from the partners (Scottish Government and COSLA) that decisions about different outcomes or services deliver the best outcomes for citizens and communities when taken at the right level of place. This is based on an acceptance of increased variation in decision-making arrangements across the country: what is right for one place will not necessarily be right for another.



### KEY POINTS:

- **ScotGov and COSLA have launched a review which aims to give communities more say in how local services are run.**
- **The first phase looks at engagement and the second phase at structure.**
- **It could have significant implications for staff.**
- **Branches are encouraged to feed into the review to ensure the staff voice is heard.**



**Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:**

Dave Watson  
[d.watson@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.watson@unison.co.uk)

0141 342 2819  
 08000 857857

## Process

There are two linked and overlapping phases to the review:

### **The first phase will focus on how decisions are taken in communities.**

This phase will involve a highly inclusive dialogue with communities including community councils, third sector interfaces, community development trusts, community anchor organisations and citizens to explore if and how reconfigured powers, accountabilities, functions and ways of working could better deliver local outcomes.

### **The second phase will focus on how decisions are taken at the level of CPPs and councils, or more regionally.**

This phase will involve the Scottish Government inviting city regions, regional groupings (eg Islands, Ayrshires), individual local authorities, CPPs and other public sector organisations to propose place-specific alternative approaches to governance, powers, accountabilities and ways of working which have the potential to improve local outcomes and drive inclusive economic growth. Proposals could include “differentially devolved” powers and functions, and new public service arrangements (eg single public services or regional collaborations) where there is a local democratic mandate for doing so.

There is the opportunity to administratively fast track proposals where there is local ambition to do so. The process will lead to legislation on local democracy, timetabled for 2020.

## UNISON response

The outcomes of this review could potentially range from strengthening current best practice on engagement, to wholesale structural change across all public services in Scotland. As such it has significant implications for UNISON members.

The commissioning partners have agreed some guiding principles and a process, but they do not, at present, share a common direction of travel for reform. The Scottish Government has been centralising services, either on a regional or national basis, together will strengthened powers of direction from the centre. Albeit with a narrative around local voice. COSLA on the other hand wants to see devolution extend further than the Scottish Parliament, down to councils and communities.

UNISON Scotland has made a wide range of submissions on public service reform that broadly makes the case for local delivery, and in particular, staff involvement in the design of services in partnership with communities. However, we have also recognised the risks of a localism approach that could lead to further fragmentation of public service delivery. Hence the case for national frameworks on staffing issues.

## Action for Branches

It is important that the voice of staff who deliver public services is heard in this process. This has too often been an afterthought in recent reform proposals.

Branches are therefore encouraged to organise local events to discuss the review and feedback views. The report of the table top discussions held at the February Scottish Council is on the website with this briefing.

There are a range of materials at the review website <http://www.gov.scot/democracymatters> and you can follow the twitter account @CommEmpower.

## Further information

### Review website

[http://www.gov.scot/democracymatters?\\_ga=2.77225877.1299711684.1528190343-79282732.1466605815](http://www.gov.scot/democracymatters?_ga=2.77225877.1299711684.1528190343-79282732.1466605815)

### UNISON Scotland Public Service Futures Bulletin

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/campaigns/public-works/futures/>

### Reid Foundation – Public Service reform

<http://reidfoundation.org/portfolio/public-service-reform/>

### Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy

<https://www.localdemocracy.info>



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team:

Dave Watson  
[d.watson@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.watson@unison.co.uk)

0141 342 2811  
0800 0 857 857