

## PE1606/C

Scottish Government Letter of 14 October 2016

Thank you for your letter of 16 September regarding Public Petition PE1606 (Forcing Scottish councils to collaborate regionally on schools and roads). I work in Public Service Reform Division and have been asked by a Scottish Government Community Liaison Officer to respond. This letter provides a view on the petitioner's call for the Scottish Government to set local authority budgets to ensure education and transport services are provided on a regional basis. It also provides a response to the Committee's request for an update on the Scottish Government's programme of public service reform, and how shared services might fit into that.

The Christie Commission continues to provide the strategic direction for public service transformation in Scotland. This places a firm focus on seeking approaches which are partnership based to ensure maximum resource is available for communities and at the front-line to help make changes that will work best in local areas.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that collaboration at all levels of our education system is fit for purpose and supports the best outcomes for our children and young people. The Governance Review that was launched in September invites views from every part of Scotland on how education – from early years to secondary school level – should be run. The review will run until 6 January 2017 and seeks views on the role that all levels of our education system play in achieving excellence and equity in schools across Scotland.

On the question of regional co-operation, the Scottish Government is committed to introducing new educational regions, to ensure that good practice is shared systematically, to free teachers of unnecessary burdens and to ensure that improvements are driven collaboratively across Scottish education. The Governance Review invites views on that commitment, including on what services or functions would best be delivered at a regional level and what factors should be considered when establishing those regions.

With regards to transport, the Scottish Government is committed to working with local government to help to improve the condition and safety of all roads, and we do this through the Road Collaboration Programme which is funded between national and local government. This programme demonstrates our commitment to ensuring integrated service provision and providing efficient public services against a backdrop of reducing public sector budgets.

The Scottish Government is also committed to a full review of the National Transport Strategy. The review is expected to clarify and possibly modify existing roles and responsibilities nationally, regionally and locally.

Reform opportunities such as those raised by the petitioner will be explored as part of Scottish Government negotiations on the local government finance settlement, which are underway. By its nature, this is a broad ranging conversation and opportunities for partnership approaches will be a key component of these discussions.

In response to the Committee's request for an update on progress to date with public service reform, the Committee may wish to see the letter from Derek MacKay MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, which he sent to Finance Committee in August, addressing the Inquiry on Prevention recommendations made by the predecessor Committee:

[http://www.parliament.scot/General%20Documents/Cabinet\\_Secretary\\_to\\_Finance\\_Committee\\_-\\_Prevention.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/General%20Documents/Cabinet_Secretary_to_Finance_Committee_-_Prevention.pdf)

An update on progress with reform is also provided annually as part of the Draft Budget.

With regard to the Committee's question on how shared services fit within the public service reform agenda, one of our key priorities is collaboration which improves outcomes and helps to divert resource to the frontline.

There are a number of actions which have, and are being taken, to support greater integration and partnership. Public procurement in Scotland provides the legislation, tools, supporting environment and structures to promote collaborative working (across a wide range of procurement activities) across the public sector, with an increasing proportion of public sector spend now done collaboratively. And the creation of Integration Joint Boards has removed the artificial barrier between local government and the NHS in the delivery of health and social care, devolving power to a locality level in order to provide a more responsive and preventative service for people.

The Scottish Government is also positive about local action emerging which is also contributing. For example, region and city deals involve local authorities working together to consider their shared vision for the region, and agree priorities to deliver inclusive economic growth. In taking forward their digital transformation priorities, something closer to a Scotland-wide approach has been adopted, with 27 local authorities jointly appointing a Chief Digital Officer and Chief Technology Officer to support collaboration. And to take advantage of the economic benefits of a more circular economy, over half of all councils have now signed the Recycling Charter and are moving towards a single system where assets are shared.

It is right there is no single mandated approach to integration, but the Scottish Government continues to work with partners, including local government, to make sure reforms are coordinated and connected. As the public service landscape continues to change, what this means practically for key partners will also be important to understand. This is recognised and reflected in the Scottish Government's commitment to work closely with local government to agree the scope and remit of a local government review by the end of the year.

I hope both the petitioner and the Committee find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Brian Logan**  
**Public Service Reform Division**