

Sun 26/07/2020 14:36

[REDACTED]

Letter from the Deputy First Minister

To Cllr Alison Evison <cllr.a.evison@aberdeenshire.gov.uk>

Cc Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government <CabSecCLG@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]



DFM Letter to Cllr
Evison - 200726.pdf

Dear Councillor Evison

Please find attached a letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Kind regards
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Deputy Private Secretary to John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | [REDACTED] | E: DFMCSE@gov.scot

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John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister
Scottish Government
St Andrews House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG



By email: DFMCSE@gov.scot

30 July 2020

Dear John

Thank you for your reply to my letter of the 27th July outlining the concerns of COSLA Group Leaders in relation to funding the return to school for children and young people in August.

As we have both acknowledged we will continue to work in partnership to ensure that we serve the best interests of our children, young people and families as we return to full time face to face education.

Following receipt of your letter Group Leaders met yesterday and agreed that we should accept the funding package that you outlined in your letter. We very much welcome the additional funding and the commitment to look at ongoing funding requirements should they be required. As I indicated in my earlier letter to you we were content with the guidance and Group Leaders have now endorsed that position alongside agreement of the funding.

As we move through the school year additional costs are indeed likely to be incurred by local authorities. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government as we see these costs emerge. It is our expectation that Scottish Government will provide additional funding to meet evidenced and reasonable costs.

We look forward to continuing working with you to ensure children, young people get the very best from their education in a safe environment.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Alison Evison
President
COSLA



John Swinney BPA/MSP
F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: dfmcse@gov.scot

Councillor Alison Evison
CoSLA
Verity House,
19 Haymarket Yards,
Edinburgh
EH12 5BH

29th July 2020

Dear Alison,

Thank you for your response of-27th July to my previous letter, including the feedback from the Group Leaders meeting, which I have taken time to consider and discuss with Ministerial colleagues.

I welcome your positive reflection on the Education Recovery Group, and in particular your endorsement that the guidance for re-opening schools will be of great benefit to local authorities and schools as they now prepare to reopen.

For the record, can I also thank you for confirming your agreement to the distribution of the £50m that I am making available for additional teachers and support staff. We are in agreement that this additional resource will be vital as we continue on our journey of education recovery and renewal.

In addition to that and the previous funding I originally outlined, I would like now to finalise our offer regarding meeting additional costs for the reopening of schools. This will be to support actions taken in accordance with the guidance, such as enhanced cleaning practices, the provision of additional transport capacity, and other associated logistics. We are of a common understanding that we do not yet know the extent of these additional costs.

Nonetheless, I remain keen that we maintain the partnership approach that has served us so well to date. Crucially, I believe that would be beneficial to us in carrying public confidence as we embark upon reopening schools in the coming weeks. On that basis, I have held discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance on how we may be able to support local authorities in responding to these requirements.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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I am grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance for her support in those discussions, and as a result of that I intend to make provision for £50m to be deployed as follows:

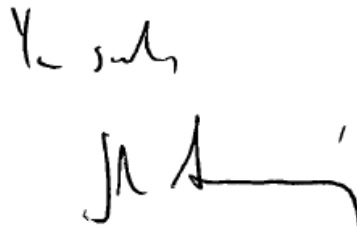
1. The £20m upfront investment as already announced – to be distributed to Local Authorities through a distribution mechanism agreed by Local Government
2. At this stage, a further £30m as part of a ring-fenced fund to meet further costs and disbursed upon evidence of need. We will work jointly with yourselves, SOLACE and other members of the Education Recovery Resources Group to assess any additional costs that local authorities believe are essential to the reopening of schools and that satisfy strict criteria of value for money, appropriateness and accountable officer scrutiny. As holders of the fund, the Scottish Government will be the ultimate arbiter of whether these costs are deemed to be reasonable and within scope.
3. Any claims on the £30m fund will have to demonstrate that the £20m upfront investment has been spent on essential costs relating to the reopening of schools, thus ensuring that all spend remains strictly additional.
4. Following the receipt and a full assessment of these claims, the Scottish Government will review whether there is a need for any further funding.

My expectation is that this approach combines the dual aims of providing the assurance local authorities require that financial support is forthcoming, while also ensuring a robust process that demonstrates transparency and adheres to appropriate financial governance.

The First Minister will make further remarks in relation to supporting education recovery in her statement to Parliament on Thursday.

I will now ask my officials to work with your own to progress the details of this fund as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,



JOHN SWINNEY

CC.

Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities
Cllr Graham Houston, Vice President of COSLA

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire
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27 July 2020

John Swinney MSP
St Andrew's House,
Regent Road, Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear John

Thank you for your letter yesterday, which formed a key part of our discussions at COSLA Group Leaders this morning. I wanted to take this opportunity to share Group Leaders views with the intention of helping support us reach agreement ahead of the announcement on Thursday on the return to full time education.

I share your assessment of the Education Recovery Group, which has been an excellent example of partnership working, reflecting the shared responsibility across spheres of government and ensuring that our colleagues in the Trade Unions and representatives of parents have been integral to developing the approach to return to schools. The safety of our children and young people has been at the heart of all of the work that has taken place over the past 4 months and I would like to thank you and your officials for your commitment to this process.

We are proud of the education and early learning and childcare services we provide to Scotland's children and young people and will take all necessary steps to ensure they can benefit from the return to schools before 18th August.

This morning, COSLA Group Leaders were pleased to agree the distribution of the £50m for the additional teaching and learning support staff to address learning loss, vital in making up any lost ground due to the closure. There was also consensus that the guidance for re-opening schools was a clear articulation of the detailed work that has been carried out by the Education Recovery Group and would be of great benefit to local authorities and schools as they prepare to reopen, however the challenge of resourcing this approach was highlighted.

Briefly I would like to set out the financial outlook facing Local Government in Scotland. We have worked closely with your colleagues to agree the welcome additional funding that you set out in your letter. Despite this constructive approach, information from our members indicates that taking extra funding and flexibilities into account, councils will still face a budget gap of around £500m for financial year 20/21, before taking account for the costs of education recovery.

The £20m for logistical costs announced last week as part of the £100m was a helpful acknowledgement of the challenges faced in implementing the full return but Group Leaders do not regard it as adequate. In light of the agreement of funding for additional teaching and learning support staff (and our shared commitment to the Promise and youth work), it was the

consensus of Group Leaders that making the remaining £45m available to Local Government as an initial investment in education recovery in the broadest sense would ensure we are in a strong position for the immediate weeks ahead. This would provide councils with the confidence to re-open schools with the appropriate public health measures in place, a vital prerequisite of addressing learning loss, and significantly reduce the financial risk to councils of implementing the guidance.

We also welcomed your commitment to a continued joint approach to the collection and analysis of costs associated with implementation of the guidance through the Education Recovery Resources Group. We agree that we can work closely together over the coming weeks to understand and address costs. It is proposed that:

- A cost collection template can be finalised next week based on the final guidance, to allow for term by term collection of additional cost information, based on a shared set of assumptions i.e. whether or not twice daily cleaning regime is required for the whole term. Education Recovery Resources Group will oversee this process;
- All councils will be asked to revisit and submit actual additional costs May – July, and projections for additional costs for term 1;
- This will allow the Education Recovery Resources Group to assess the adequacy of the quantum of £45m and to ascertain what additional funding is required;
- The Education Recovery Resources Group will work together to agree quality assurance processes to assess costs;
- The Scottish Government will give due consideration to additional costs associated with implementing the guidance;
- The Scottish Government will provide a commitment to meeting all reasonable additional costs;
- Options for distribution of additional funding to be considered through agreed governance routes;
- This process can stand in place for each term as required, with the understanding that as we move into phase 4 of the Scottish Government's route map the majority of the public health measures and associated costs may be removed.

I hope the constructive approach set out above is helpful. I would welcome continued dialogue on this in the coming days. I understand that the Cabinet is meeting on Wednesday and Group Leaders have indicated that they would also be willing to meet to discuss any further commitments you are willing to make. This would allow the guidance to be approved before your announcement on Thursday.

Cllr Alison Evison

COSLA President

CC.

Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities

Cllr Graham Houston, Vice President of COSLA

Cllr Gail McGregor, COSLA Resources Spokesperson

Cllr McCabe, COSLA Children and Young People's Spokesperson

From the President, Councillor Alison Evison



3 June 2020

Kate Forbes MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance
The Scottish Government

By email: CabSecFinance@gov.scot

Dear Ms Forbes

COVID-19 – ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the £155m consequentials for Local Government, which will make a significant contribution towards the additional costs incurred to date. I also welcome the agreement to pay this sum in full during June, as this will assist with the cash flow for Local Government.

Officers have supplied you with details surrounding Local Authorities' spend to date in responding to the COVID-19 emergency. Work is now ongoing with all councils to look at the full year impact on finances, having previously focussed on the 3 month period to 30 June 2020.

To date the main focus of additional costs has been the Immediate Mobilisation of services and support to local communities, such as emergency food supplies, supporting essential workers, and social care costs out with, and in addition to, Integrated Joint Boards.

However, this is only part of the story, with Local Authority budgets severely impacted by loss of income, inability to recover capital costs, impact on cash flow and increased bad debt, and resources diverted away from delivering planned savings.

Latest updated figures, after accounting for Scottish Government funding indicate that the net additional costs to Local Government in the period to 30 June now total £145.5m, up from £95.8m, with the main difference being costs formerly charged to capital being met from the General Fund. This has been the subject of discussion between your officers, and Audit Scotland.

As collectively we turn to the recovery phase it is clear that Local Authorities will incur significant additional costs, specifically around maintaining social distancing rules, with schools being seen as a particularly challenging area. Work is underway to clarify these, and once information is collated, I would welcome further discussions with you. Officers are getting differing views around the scope for funding flexibility from different Government Departments, and it is essential that maximum flexibility is afforded. However, at this stage

I do not believe that there is sufficient capacity, and Local Authorities cannot continue to incur additional cost without the resources to meet these new requirements.

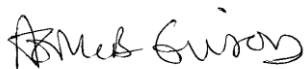
Work to date has illustrated the crucial role that Local Government has played, and continues to play, in responding to the emergency and I thank you for recognising that in your letter. I totally understand the financial challenges that the Scottish Government faces in its own response to the emergency, but I do hope you will agree with me that additional resources will be required to continue to deliver essential services. I ask for your commitment to prioritising the ongoing and increasing financial requirements of Local Government. To that end I would propose that CoSLA and the Scottish Government write a joint letter to the Treasury to seek further resources from the UK Government.

There can be absolutely no doubt that Local Authorities do not have sufficient resources to address all the issues on their own. CoSLA is working with the other Local Government Agencies in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to seek support from the Treasury to acknowledge the significant impact of the loss of income, which is anticipated to last for some time and well into the recovery phase. I would welcome your support for this campaign.

Collaboratively I hope that we can explore other areas which may require a change in legislation to provide a short term solution to part of the financial challenge in the event of additional cash resources not being available. This may cover end year flexibility, and powers to borrow. CoSLA officers would be happy to explore options with your officials in more detail. These suggestions are not easy and will have longer term implications. Nevertheless, it is important that every avenue is explored, and I would appreciate your commitment to doing this.

These are extremely challenging times, and CoSLA will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to seek the resources necessary to protect the essential local services that Local Authorities provide.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Evison', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Alison Evison
President