**Local governance review: joint statement**

***A joint statement from The Scottish Government and The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) on the local governance review.***

**Democracy Matters to Scotland**

**Communities want more decision-making powers.**

20 years ago this summer the Scottish Parliament opened its doors, as the people of Scotland asked for many of the decisions that most affect their lives to be taken closer to home. With the growth of our democracy came a fresh set of questions about whether a stronger culture of local decision-making could take root in community life.

Human rights are at the heart of the evolution of our democratic frameworks, at national and local level. We want a vibrant, equal democracy where people understand their rights, and actively participate in civic society. Working together we can create a society where everyone is valued, treated with dignity and respect, with access to opportunities and quality of life. To achieve this, we must begin by listening to people and communities.

Last year over 4,000 thousand people responded to an invitation from the Scottish Government and Local Government to consider these important questions together.

We heard from people with very different backgrounds, experiences and interests. Overwhelmingly, they told us that communities can really flourish if they have control and influence over decisions that affect them most. We also heard from local councils and other public sector organisations about the powers and resources they need to strengthen their role as community champions.

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Scotland’s new parliament, the Scottish Government and COSLA are announcing today that they will work together to further empower local communities and councils across Scotland. By working with a wide range of interests, we can create a system of accessible, community-led decision making that will become integrated into Scottish society.

Our approach will be forward looking and bold, embracing new types of decision-making. And crucially, our focus will be on improving people’s lives by achieving the outcomes set out in the world leading National Performance Framework.

Communities and Local Government Secretary, Aileen Campbell, said:

“A wide range of people with very different backgrounds, experiences and interests overwhelmingly responded that they want to have more say about how local public services are run in their area.

“We want to see a step-change in democracy in Scotland where decisions on public services are made in communities - where they have the biggest impact.

“Options are open as to what services are devolved, however throughout the process people have told us there will be a lot of detail to work out if we are to get this right.  As a result we will not rush to introduce legislation in this Parliament. We have an exciting opportunity to shape the future of democracy so local communities can really flourish.”

The COSLA President, Cllr. Alison Evison, said:

“The initial stages of this review have made clear that local, democratic choice and control matters to people’s lives.

“There is now a need across the country to achieve improved outcomes for our communities, particularly those communities suffering persistent inequality.

“With leadership from Local Government and Scottish Government, we will continue the conversation to get it right and give communities more say in decisions that impact on them”

Director for Electoral Reform Society Scotland, Willie Sullivan, said:

“The biggest threat to democracy is that it does not grow and adapt quickly enough to meet the expectations of citizens. It's clear that we have to remake democracy and governance for a time of rapid social and technological change and authoritarian threats. The only way to do this is from the local up and along with as many people as possible. The Scottish Government and COSLA seem to be embracing these ideas. Doing this well and getting it right will take time and attention. We welcome the progress made and will keep ensuring that democracy is at the centre of the hope for future transformation so that Scots can know the power and pride of running their own towns and villages”

Director of National Development for BEMIS Scotland, Mrs. Tanveer Parnez, said:

“Utilising a human rights-based approach, in addition to facilitating participative democracy, within the Local Governance Review and associated Democracy Matters conversations, present an attentive and much needed approach to advancing democratic participation, active citizenship and empowerment for diverse communities at several levels. We have seen the impact of this approach through the positive and dynamic participation from diverse local communities in the first consultation phase, and we are fully committed to enhancing and progressing the equal partaking and participation of diverse communities in the next round of engagement and any new decision-making arrangements.”