



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Councillor Alison Evison
President
Convention of Scottish Local
Authorities (COSLA)

By email only

**Net Zero, Energy and Transport
Committee**

c/o Clerk to the Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

netzero.committee@Parliament.Scot

8 June 2022

Dear President,

**Inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners
in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland**

We are now moving into the closing stages of evidence-taking in this wide-ranging inquiry. We are grateful to COSLA for their early engagement with us on this work and for providing a written submission in response to our call for views. I also put on record our thanks to the staff and elected Members of local authorities who have been assisting us during our recent programme of inquiry-related visits, demonstrating how local government is responding positively and with enthusiasm to the daunting challenge of net zero.

We also look forward to our evidence session with you at a Committee meeting after the summer recess. (The clerks will be in touch in due course to propose a date.)

A number of important issues have been raised over the course of evidence-taking, and the Committee recently agreed that I should write to COSLA to request more information on some of these. We would be most grateful if COSLA could make use of its networks and contacts across Scotland's 32 local authorities to collate a sector-wide response on the following questions:

1. The Committee would welcome information on how many councils employ officers whose main role is expressly to lead and coordinate the council's drive to achieve net zero;
2. The number of, and seniority of, such officers within the council administration (appreciating that this answer may vary across councils);
3. Whether most councils now have a "net zero committee" or equivalent, whose main role is to drive forward net zero policy at a political and

policy-making level, or are in the process of forming such a committee after recent elections;

4. Data (covering 5 or 10 years if possible) as to trends in council budgets for their planning departments, along with any further information that may put this in context. It would also be helpful to have data and information as to trends in the staffing of council planning departments and on whether there are any recent signs of abatement in the downward staffing trajectory that was raised in the context of recent scrutiny of the fourth national planning framework. Does local government have a view on whether treating planning as a STEM subject in higher and further education would help in making it a more attractive career?
5. Whether councils feel they have the right balance of skills and experience in planning and other departments to enable them to make key decisions at points in the planning process that are fully “net zero” aware? Could more be done in training planners or in their continuing professional development to enable these skillsets?
6. Views from councils on where the main causes of delay within the planning system appear to lie in relation to developments that could have a positive net zero impact (e.g. renewables projects): is there a particular point in the process where delays tend to occur or a most commonly occurring reason for such developments being delayed?
7. What expertise exists within local authorities to provide energy efficiency advice and support to homeowners. Are there councils with officers who offer or who have previously offered this service?
8. Whether councils have started to compile a database of the domestic dwellings and non-domestic buildings that will require to be retro-fitted and prepared for decarbonised heating in order to meet the 2030 Heat in Buildings strategy.

I expect COSLA will have been following evidence-taking during the inquiry and you are, of course, welcome to provide further information or commentary in relation to any other matter to have arisen so far over the inquiry’s course that you think may be of use to us and help us prepare for remaining evidence sessions.

It would be helpful to have a reply by Monday 22 August.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Lockhart MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee